

Tales from Speaker Bedke's legislative crypt

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune Welcome to the legislative crypt, where good ideas go to die — that is, of course, if those good ideas originate with Idaho Democrats.

The sign at the gate reads: House Ways and Means Committee. That's where House Speaker Scott Bedke assigns bills he means to ignore. No way does the Ways and Means Committee even convene without Bedke's say-so.

Now resting comfortably in the speaker's committee, never to be heard from again, are a series of "personal bills" House Democrats introduced earlier in the session. Among them:

I House Bill 72 — House Democratic Leader Mat Erpelding of Boise proposes the first boost in Idaho's minimum wage since Congress last raised the federal standard to \$7.25 an hour nearly a decade ago. This measure would incrementally elevate Idaho's minimum wage to \$12 by 2019 and then adjust it for inflation thereafter.

I House Bill 69 — Another Erpelding measure would add the words "sexual orientation and gender identity" to Idaho's Human Rights Act, thereby banning discrimination on the job, in housing and in public accommodations. Year after year, legislative leadership has refused to pursue this legislation, leaving it to cities such as Lewiston and Moscow to pass their own anti-discrimination ordinances.

I House Bill 60 — Rep. Ilana Rubel, D-Boise, proposes allowing people to update their voter registration when renewing a driver's license or state-issued identifications. If you want to encourage more people to vote, here's a good way to start.

I House Bill 59 — Rubel wants Idaho to join an interstate compact binding the state to award its four Electoral College votes to the presidential candidate who wins the popular vote.

I House Bill 71 — Rep. Melissa Wintrow of Boise would bar prospective employers from asking job applicants what they currently earn. Without that information, employers would decide what salary to pay based on what the job is worth — and not penalize potential workers, primarily women, who are already stuck in a wage gap.

I House Bill 62 — Rep. John McCrostie of Boise would prohibit subjecting minors and vulnerable adults to "conversion therapy," which strives to alter a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

I House Bill 61 — Rubel would level the playing field between employers and former employees involved in disputes over non-compete agreements.

I House Joint Resolution 1 — Wintrow proposes adoption of an Equal Rights Amendment to the Idaho Constitution. This measure comes 40 years after state lawmakers rescinded Idaho's ratification of a proposed ERA to the U.S. Constitution.

I House Joint Resolution 2 — McCrostie proposes erasing the state constitutional ban on same-sex marriage now that the U.S. Supreme Court has voided it.

I House Resolution 1 — Rubel would empower lawmakers to obtain a legislative hearing for any bill provided at least 10 members — five Republicans and five Democrats — sign on as co-sponsors. That's still a high bar but it might keep a few bills out of the legislative crypt.

By no means can you call these bills shoo-ins. Powerful conservative winds blow in this state .

Neither can you call these fringe ideas. If nothing else, they reach ordinary Idahoans where they live. People understand what's involved.

You can walk into any restaurant, city park or workplace in the state. Ask people about some of these ideas. You'll get an earful about the minimum wage, equal pay for equal work and whether the electoral or popular vote ought to elect the next president.

What you won't get is apathy.

Don't you think the people you've hired to represent your interests in Boise ought to at least debate these ideas?

Instead, they're wrapped up in a lot of drivel that passes for legislative action right now.

Such as the idea Rep. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins, is promoting that suggests state lawmakers can nullify federal laws, regulations and court decisions.

Or the bill Rep. Eric Redman, R-Athol, is promoting to supposedly protect Idahoans from Sharia Law.

If Rep. Ron Nate, R-Rexburg, had his way, some Idaho motorists would be liberated from the undue burden of placing license plates on their front bumpers.

Argue all day long, if you'd like, about the merits of Democratic and Republican ideas. But as long as Idaho voters insist on one-party rule, that debate will occur outside the Capitol Dome, not under it. — M.T.