

# Mention ethics in Idaho and you hear crickets

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## Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

As ethics reform measures go, what Sen. Marv Hagedorn, R-Meridian, sought to accomplish was fairly modest stuff.

He wasn't trying to stop any current lawmaker from cashing in on his or her legislative service. They still would be able to join a fairly long line of prominent veterans who have enjoyed a peculiar state pension spike available only to them.

It works like this: When Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter appoints a legislator to a high-paying administrative post, that lawmaker gets the best of both worlds. He multiplies his new salary against all those years of legislative service. Virtually no other part-time state worker gets the same break.

So over the years, the conservative Idaho Freedom Foundation's

IdahoReporter.com has compiled a list. Here are only a few examples:

- Former state Rep. Eric Anderson, R-Priest Lake - After five terms in the House, he was entitled to a \$708 monthly pension. His appointment to the Public Utilities Commission elevates that payout to about \$4,500.
- Former budget committee Co-Chairman Dean Cameron, R-Rupert - The 12-term lawmaker's appointment to run the state Department of Insurance boosted his state pension from an estimated \$704 a month to \$4,845. IFF says that's worth more than \$1 million in lifetime benefits.
- Former Sen. John Tippets, R-Montpelier - By accepting Otter's offer to head up the Department of Environmental Quality, this nine-term veteran will convert what would have been an estimated \$492 monthly pension to \$3,651.
- Former Senate President Pro Tem Bob Geddes, R-Soda Springs - When he took over at the Department of Administration, Geddes nearly doubled the \$1,052 monthly pension his eight terms and previous stint at the State Tax Commission entitled him to receive.
- Former state Sen. Elliot Werk, D-Boise. When he moved up to the State Tax Commission, Werk's potential pension benefit expanded from \$333 a month to an estimated \$2,250.

None of which has escaped public notice.

Everyone from former Gov. Phil Batt to members of the citizens commission on legislative compensation considers this an affront to ethical government. Even the House voted to stop it a couple of years ago, only to have it blocked in the Senate.

Wednesday, Hagedorn made another attempt before the Senate State Affairs Committee.

He was not asking anyone in the room to forfeit the chance to earn a lucrative pension. Hagedorn's measure virtually grandfathered anyone who is now serving in the Legislature. Every year of legislative service before Dec. 1, 2018, would be counted toward a pension spike.

In other words, reform would begin slowly, kicking off a class of legislators yet to be elected.

But at least Hagedorn was willing to start.

Why wouldn't the senior members of the Senate - leaders from both parties - leap at the chance to end a practice that has tainted the reputation of their institution?

You'll have to ask them.

Their initial reaction to Hagedorn's bill was the sound of crickets.

Literally.

Not one committee member moved to print Hagedorn's bill, let alone hold a hearing and debate it.

On reconsideration, Hagedorn nudged them forward but his motion died on a 5-to-4 vote.

Among the majority who killed it were:

- Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill, R-Rexburg, who is serving his ninth term.
- Senate Majority Leader Bart Davis, R-Idaho Falls, who is in his 10th term.
- Assistant Sen. Majority Leader Chuck Winder, R-Boise, who is now in his fifth term.
- Republican Caucus Chairman Todd Lakey, R-Nampa, who is a three-term veteran.
- Senate Democratic Leader Michelle Stennett of Ketchum, who is serving her fourth term.

Hagedorn promises to return with a new bill next year. But so far, some of Idaho's most respected lawmakers are standing by something that reeks of self-dealing. All of which leads you to wonder: What else are they willing to tolerate? - M.T.