

Giddings auditioned on Idaho's newest stage

Marty Trilhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Monday, Rep. Priscilla Giddings, R-White Bird, did more than disregard the rule book.

First she tore out the pages.

Next, she shredded them.

And then stomped all over the remains.

There was a time when such behavior got freshman lawmakers in a heap of trouble.

Things are not like they used to be.

In some circles, you're going to hear talk that a political star has been born.

Good news, this is not.

Not that far back, freshman legislators got ahead by keeping their heads down, their mouths shut and their ears open. Over time, they honed their skills, built relationships and acquired credibility.

In short, they displayed respect for the institution and waited their turn.

But here was Giddings bringing the Idaho House to a standstill. The issue was an update in the laws governing Idaho's notaries public. Keep in mind, we're talking about people who authenticate documents. Fairly dry stuff, the kind of template that a staid Uniform Law Commission - legal experts, judges and lawmakers - comes up with to spare individual states from reinventing the wheel or blocking the free flow of documents across state lines and international borders.

Nonetheless, Reps. Heather Scott, R-Blanchard, and Christy Zito, R-Hammett, warned the House State Affairs Committee about the goblins of globalism they recognized in a uniform notary public law.

Nobody bought it, and the bill proceeded to the House floor.

That's when Giddings refused to comply with the customary unanimous consent to allow a cursory reading of a bill's title.

She demanded the measure be read in full.

That's her right.

Nothing would dissuade her.

Not a nudge from leadership.

Not the unusual call of the House and the locking of the chamber's doors.

Not even a 60-8 vote of her colleagues demanding that Giddings - rather than the House clerk - step up and read the bill herself.

About 90 minutes later, after she had finished doing so, the full House stampeded Giddings and approved the measure 63 to 7.

Moreover, the White Bird Republican seemed at a loss to explain herself to the Tribune's William L. Spence.

Some of her constituents opposed the bill, she said, but she couldn't say how many had contacted her.

Giddings seemed to duck and weave when asked to explain the points of her constitutional challenge. House Speaker Scott Bedke later opined her message got "drowned by her actions."

So Giddings is damaged goods, right?

Her leadership has doubts about her.

Her colleagues humiliated her.

Back home, Giddings' constituents might be asking themselves how having their representative in Boise alienate the House leadership and many of her colleagues does them any good. They elected her to help solve problems and express the local viewpoint to the state leadership - not to become infamous in less than two months.

You'd think there would be some political hell to pay.

But let's face it: Giddings is a former fighter pilot. She's smart. She seems well-read. She's articulate. Why would she pick a fight over something so innocuous?

Can we assume Giddings understands how the tectonic plates of politics have shifted in the era of the tweet?

We're dealing with a public suffering from attention-deficit disorder. Social media sets the rules. Fact-checking is too slow and irrelevant. No publicity is bad publicity.

The alt-right? That's yesterday's newspaper. This is the alt-reality.

And you can bet that by this time next week, you won't find one ordinary constituent who can explain the details of the bill or the merits behind Giddings' maneuver.

What they'll remember will be the optics of this legislative rebel essentially filibustering for 90 minutes, thumbing her nose at authority, railing at the bogeyman of internationalism and defending the sanctity of Idaho self-government.

Theatrics trump results.

People have ended up in Congress for doing far less. - M.T.