

Up Front/Commentary: Live, from Boise, it's the Idaho Republican show!

By William L. Spence of the Tribune | [1 comment](#)

BOISE - Let us pause and give thanks.

In a session destined for mediocrity - one poised to stupefy with money squabbles and bleak debates over energy regulations and insurance exchanges - it is appropriate that we express our gratitude for Idaho Republicans.

They have rescued us from boredom. We the media, the politically jaded, we the reality TV fans and monster truck ralliers - they have spared us from mere legislation.

This is particularly true of House leadership.

It's been fascinating to watch them these past few weeks. They've managed to turn the session into a soap opera, taking issues that might otherwise have drawn yawns and transforming them into gripping drama.

The Occupy Boise protest, for example, was largely being ignored until Assistant Majority Leader Scott Bedke proposed ousting the encampment from the Capitol Mall.

That prompted two days of incredibly eloquent testimony, with reporters and television cameras recording every word. More weeks of news coverage will follow as the bill winds its way through the Legislature.

Thanks, Scott. Instead of snarky stories about how aimless and ineffective the protest has been, you hand the media a "politicians trample free speech" alternative, complete with weeping women, 80-year-old military veterans complaining about their First Amendment rights being relegated to the back of the bus, and homeless guys saying they could have frozen to death if Occupy Boise hadn't offered them a place to sleep.

Way to write the story onto the front page.

To be fair, Reps. Erik Simpson and Max Black deserve some credit as well. Simpson's fears about Woodstock-like free-for-all's hindering access to the Legislature and Black's concerns about angry Holsteins marauding across the Capitol lawn certainly helped boost the saga's titter value.

Their efforts hardly compare, though, to what House Speaker Lawrence Denney accomplished with the redistricting commission.

Redistricting may be the longest-running political drama in Idaho history, with multiple episodes of backroom deal-making and blatant gerrymandering. Yet after the first commission fell on its face last summer - failing to produce a redistricting plan in the allotted time - the second commission turned into a happy-happy-joy-joy example of bipartisan cooperation.

How dull is that? Republicans and Democrats getting along, working together, compromising for the good of all Idahoans? We might as well be watching Lawrence Welk reruns.

Thank goodness for Denney and Idaho Republican Party Chairman Norm Semanko.

Even after the Idaho Supreme Court tossed its initial redistricting plan, the commission could have flown under the radar, adopting a new plan in a low-profile, noncontroversial way. But Denny and Semanko saved us from such mush. Like executive producers loading up the sex-and-violence during ratings sweeps week, they turned redistricting into must-see TV by "firing" their commission appointees for being too darn nice.

Who cares if they lacked the authority? It was a stroke of genius. As one Republican aide noted: "It's going to be like a car crash that happens over and over and over."

Outstanding! Occupy bullying, redistricting wrecks - what more could Idahoans want from their elected representatives?

Granted, Republicans come out of this looking like Godzilla stepping on Bambi - "arrogant buffoons" was a term one lawmaker used - but they definitely grabbed our attention.

So thank you, Scott. Thank you, Lawrence and Norm. Expecting a toilsome session, you give us theater. Expecting gruel, you offer popcorn. What will you come up with next?

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