

What Doesn't He Understand?

Chris Carlson/St. Maries Gazette Record

Shame on State Senator Bob Nonini. It was bad enough that the ethically-challenged state senator from District 3 went unpunished by the Senate Leadership for his role in helping to secure contributions and contributing himself to Tea Party challengers to Republican incumbent state senators like Shawn Keough from Sandpoint and Dean Cameron from Rupert.

The latter two are two of the hardest working members of the Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee and are veteran, reasonable, caring listening legislators. Nonini last year, in an apparent effort to curry favor with the then House Speaker Lawrence Denny, and the Tea Party types conspired with among others Avista lobbyist Neil Colwell to secure and send some substantial contributions to challengers to incumbents in his party.

Nonini had to know he was putting at risk his ability work with his future colleagues should he fail, but apparently didn't care. Colwell at least received a dressing down from his superiors at Avista and CEO Scott Morris drove to Sandpoint to meet personally with and apologize to Senator Keough and Representatives Erik Anderson and George Eskridge for the perfidy and stupidity of their lobbyist.

Rumors circulated before the session that the GOP Senate Leadership, capably led by Senate Pro Tempore Brent Hill and Majority Leader Bart Davis, planned to deny Nonini any committee assignments and ban him from the Republican caucus. Nothing of the sort happened, however.

Unlike Nonini, Senators Hill and Davis are honorable men. Shame on them, though, for letting Nonini's stupidity go unpunished.

Now Nonini is pushing a bill that would divert \$10 million from the already underfunded budget for education. The funds instead would be directed to parents and others as a tax credit for scholarship monies they may have paid to send a child to a private school.

Nonini says taking a kid out of the public classroom and incentivizing parents to send to a private school would save money. Come again? The operations and

maintenance cost for the school remain the same whether there are 25 students in the class or 24.

Nonini should find a copy of Idaho 's State Constitution and carefully read (I started to write "reread" and realized I was making a heck 'uv an assumption) Article 9, section 1 and 5.

Section 1 says the State Legislature is obligated to establish and "maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools." Nothing in there about private schools is there?

Section 5 says no public dollars shall be allocated "in aid of any church or sectarian or religious society, or for any sectarian or religious purpose to help support or sustain any school, academy, seminary, college, university or other literary or scientific institution controlled by any church, sectarian or religious denomination whatsoever." Sounds pretty clear to me?

One wonders just who Nonini is carrying water for on this kind of thing. Such cynicism is not warranted, you say? You might be correct.

I don't use the phrase "ethically challenged" lightly. Look for yourself at the record contained in the Idaho Supreme Court Data Repository. Here are the case numbers: CV 1996-0006260, *Bonner Properties vs. Robert P. Nonini*; CV 1992-0089158, *Coeur d'Alene Adjustment Bureau vs. Robert Nonini*; CV 1992-0088598, *Met Mortgage Finance, Inc. vs. Robert Nonini*. Go yourself to the Courthouse, look them up and peruse the contents, then draw your own conclusions.

Too bad the Senate Leadership did not see fit to punish him for his perfidy. A good starting point would have been to let him know that no bill he sponsored was going to go anywhere this session. Then we wouldn't have to worry about his diverting \$10 million from public education for private education, would we?