

Ringo opposes spending money to support 'bad decision'

Ringo opposes JFAC's allocation to Constitutional Defense Fund

Terri Harber, Moscow-Pullman Daily News

The Idaho Legislature's Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee endorsed a transfer of \$1 million from Idaho's general fund to the Constitutional Defense Fund - a request made by Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter.

Rep. Shirley Ringo, D-Moscow, a member of that committee, opposed the move, which will allocate money to defend the state's constitutional ban on same-sex marriage and civil unions.

"I wasn't interested in spending money on supporting a bad decision," Ringo said Wednesday during a state legislative teleconference hosted by the Moscow Chamber of Commerce. "It won't hold up constitutionally."

Otter has said he wants see the state defend its ban, and he announced in January he wanted to see the Constitutional Defense Fund, which would be a source of money to pay for such an effort, financed by that amount when he proposed his fiscal year budget.

Four gay couples are suing the state because of its constitutional amendment making it illegal for same-sex couples to wed. It was approved by voters in 2006. Also in January, Attorney General Lawrence Wasden secured the right to defend the state's ban, according to previous reports.

"The fund has been utilized for a variety of purposes that include everything from the endangered species act, parental consent or, as in this case, you reference the part of the Idaho Constitution that maintains that marriage is defined as being between one man and one woman," wrote Jon Hanian, Otter's press secretary, in response to a telephone inquiry by the Daily News on Wednesday.

The fund was created in 1995 to provide money for defending the state and its constitution, Hanian said.

The Moscow Human Rights Commission hasn't yet taken up the issue of gay marriage. Chairman Ken Faunce said it's likely the members would support same-sex marriages being legal in Idaho - if they opted to take up the matter sometime in the future.

Members of this city advisory group recently completed a draft letter for the Moscow City Council explaining its stance against House Bills 426 and 427, the controversial religious freedom bills sponsored by Rep. Lynn Luker, R-Boise.

The council members last week opted not to send a letter to the Capitol after finding out the bills weren't advancing.

Moscow and six other Idaho cities have enacted bans against discrimination based on sexual orientation. The Luker bills would have overturned these local ordinances.

Ringo also said she saw "no end of places" where the money could be allocated instead. One good effort would be using it to partially finance raising salaries for state employees and teachers.

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