

# Can you hear me now?

## **Randy Stapilus/Ridenbaugh Press**

After describing in a recent column annoying cell phone service gaps in the Idaho Statehouse, the Lewiston Tribune's William Spence remarked how that serves as a metaphor for this:

“I can't count the number of hearings I've attended where the testimony is skewed entirely one way or the other and the committee votes the opposite way.”

In my days covering the legislature years ago, that happened seldom. If the testimony was strongly weighted in one direction, that ordinarily was how the committee would vote. Apparently not so much these days.

I crowdsourced the question of whether Spence was right. The crowd told me that he was.

The legislative examples cited most were guns on campus, Medicaid expansion and “add the words.” Large crowds showed in support of the the latter two and against the first; few people countered; the committees involved wasted little time siding with the few. (They did at least, it should be said, hear out the public first.)

Holli Woodings, a former state representative, offered: “Guns on campus. I listened to an entire day of testimony against it, and still was in the committee minority voting nay. There were two, maybe three folks who testified in favor, and dozens against, including law enforcement, educators, students, administration, and others who actually had a stake.” The proposal won approval.

Activist Donna Yule: “Happens all the time in the Idaho statehouse. It's extremely frustrating to all the people who take the time to testify. I've come to the conclusion that most of the GOP Chairs of the committees already have their minds made up, and they care more about their base voters than the people of Idaho. But I still think the testimony matters. Even though they ignore the people testifying, it still makes them uncomfortable, and maybe eventually the people will get angry enough to rise up against them and vote in some new people who WILL listen.”

Do your representatives listen? Actually listen, or just sit there with minds made up?

Idaho's United States senators have been barraged with comments and protesters in recent weeks, but there's been little response from them.

After Senator Mike Crapo's office rebuffed media requests to find out how Idahoans calling in on Education Secretary-designate Betsy DeVos stood, a staffer let slip to the Payette County commissioners: “DeVos is the one we're hearing the most about ... and I think 95 percent are against her.” Crapo, and fellow Idaho Senator Jim Risch, voted for DeVos' confirmation, and said little or nothing about what they were hearing from back home.

Okay. It's possible not every protesting call or visit came from a constituent (though I'd bet the great bulk of them did). It isn't the job of a representative to vote in the popular direction every time. Yes, it's those in opposition who usually are most motivated to step up, more than those in support. Sometimes the majority is wrong; it happens.

But when this kind of dissonance happens as often as it seems to (and yes, Idaho is not alone in this), something is wrong.

In saying this, I'm looking most directly at the voters. Are you not being listened to? Are your concerns not being met? Are your representatives not doing what you want them to do?

If you think so, then: Are you getting organized and out to the polls? That's the message that will be heard without a doubt.

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Randy Stapilus is a former Idaho newspaper reporter and editor, blogs at [www.ridenbaugh.com](http://www.ridenbaugh.com). He can be reached at [stapilus@ridenbaugh.com](mailto:stapilus@ridenbaugh.com). A book of his Idaho columns from the past decade, Crossing the Snake, is available at [www.ridenbaughpress.com/crossing](http://www.ridenbaughpress.com/crossing).