

Do these political grandstanders have a point?

Marty Trilhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Nobody seriously expected the Idaho Legislature to do much in the way of the people's business this year.

Expanding Medicaid coverage to 78,000 of Idaho's lower-income working adults was a nonstarter.

As was doing anything more than allowing the state's institutions of higher learning to tread water.

You can forget even hinting at social justice - whether it means ending legal discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity or raising the state's minimum wage.

Even the much ballyhooed expansion of state public education funding has done nothing to lessen the need for local property taxpayers to shore up their school budgets.

Maybe your roads will get patched. Perhaps your taxes will drop a bit.

We'll see.

At the very least, you could assume the Legislature would do its own business - which involved wrapping things up as scheduled Friday.

Yet a group of insurrectionists - among them Reps. Priscilla Giddings, R-White Bird, Heather Scott, R-Blanchard, and Ron Nate, R-Rexburg - last week succeeded in blocking even that modest goal.

They brought things to a crawl by exploiting a feature of the House rules. Dispensing with the reading of bills up for a vote requires unanimous consent and they objected.

What's the objective behind this rebellion?

Your guess is as good as anyone else's.

Scott started the year off by accusing House leadership of handing out committee chairmanships to female lawmakers who "spread their legs." That got her in hot water with House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, who stripped Scott of her committee assignments.

If that was Scott's cause célèbre, why did she accept Bedke's terms for the restoration of her legislative rights and privileges by issuing a retraction and an apology?

Perhaps nothing has drawn more attention to Nate than his steadfast refusal to vote for spending bills under the guise that Idaho should be allocating more money for the state's underpaid teachers.

But the minute Nate thinks nobody's listening, he says things like this on a hot mic: "We all know our districts. We know that there are some teachers that are clearly overpaid."

Giddings refused to give unanimous consent on an update of Idaho's notary public statute. She wound up triggering a call of the House and then was compelled to read the bill at length herself. But when the Tribune's William L. Spence caught up with her, the freshman Republican stumbled over her explanation.

None of which repeals the basic math of the Legislature. To be effective, you need to round up a majority of the 70 House members, a majority of the 35 Senate members and then get the governor's support.

That means earning the trust and respect of your fellow lawmakers - and the blessing of the leadership in each body.

Instead, Giddings, Nate, Scott and their band seem content to continue kicking the legislative bear.

In fact, Scott got her comeuppance Friday when she asked for unanimous consent to change her votes on a pair of previous bills. For anyone else, it would have been a simple courtesy. Scott's request, however, drew an immediate objection from House Democratic leader Mat Erpelding of Boise.

How does that serve the interests of the people who elected them?

On the other hand, they labor among 105 legislators who for all intents and purposes are faceless to the vast majority of people in whose name they serve.

No longer can you say that about Giddings, Nate or Scott. For three months, their machinations against Bedke's oftentimes feeble response have formed the central narrative of an otherwise lackluster session.

They have created a political brand. At least to the people whose support they crave, Giddings, Scott and Nate are known commodities.

Could that be the point? - M.T.