

House Highlights

By Tom Loertscher

During the legislative session each year there are several organizations that have their meetings in Boise which affords their members a chance to meet and chat with legislators. This week The Farm Bureau had their meetings as did the Idaho Association of Counties. I like these two events because I get a chance to talk to folks from home and hear what is on their minds.

Farm Bureau, of course, has as their focus the needs of rural Idaho and arguably our district is one of the most rural of the state. One of the big issues that was brought up, is the Senate bill that would elevate cruelty to animals to a felony. During those discussions it became clear that there is a difference of opinion on the bill even amongst the members. Before this comes before the House, I will be reading the legislation carefully to determine if this is a good idea or not. A couple of years ago when this came up I was having a conversation in which the person accused all farmers and ranchers of being cruel to their animals. My response was that if farmers abuse their animals, their animals will abuse them back, will not perform well and they are soon out of business.

The counties spent most of the week in Boise for what they call their mid-winter conference. For the most part they are not too visible and we don't get much of a chance to visit with our local officials. There were a couple of things that stood out this year more than I have seen other years.

I had scheduled a hearing in State Affairs on Wednesday for a bill that would have moved the primary election to August where it resided prior to 1980. I almost chickened out about going ahead with the hearing because I rather suspected that there was not enough support in the committee to get it passed to the floor of the House. And I knew that having all of the county clerks from around the state there, they would more than likely let their wishes be known. But I decided to go ahead knowing that a lot of clerks

would have the chance to testify on the bill because they were already in town for their meetings.

When I came into the hearing room I spent some time talking and joking around with the clerks prior to the meeting telling them I hoped they wouldn't be too rough on me. It was particularly noteworthy that several indicated during their testimony that they had previously not participated in a committee hearing of any kind. Well, at least I was right about one thing, the bill went down in flames.

Later that evening Sen. Tippets, Rep. Gibbs and I met with county elected officials from our district to discuss legislation and rumors of legislation. They wanted to know what the chances were for some matters to pass and wanted us to ease their fears of some of the rumored things they had heard about. I can wholeheartedly recommend these "over a bowl of ice cream" discussions. Come to think of it, when things get a little "hot" around this place maybe we should cool off with a bowl.