

House Highlights

By Tom Loertscher

Sometimes in life timing is everything and it seems like the stars line up. Other times not so much. I have been working for quite some time on a piece of legislation to change the date of the primary election from May to August. The Primary election was held in August before Idaho decided to join in a presidential primary. And now that the political parties will be caucusing to choose their nominees, there is no longer a need for the presidential candidates to appear on the primary ballot, it seemed like a good idea to move the election back to August.

Little did I know that the Supreme Court was about to dispense with the redistricting plan that was adopted by the Redistricting Commission. You can call it foresight, or just plain luck or even coincidence but the agenda for introducing the legislation was in place before I had any idea the court was about to rule. With the commission having to come up with a plan that will pass constitutional muster, the counties will have a tough time complying with the May primary date and to get everything in place for the election. At this moment, legislative candidates don't know what district they might be in and the filing date is about a month away. Needless to say the bill, House Bill 392 has already stirred things up and everyone has an opinion.

We don't seem to lack for controversy, even this early in the session. A bill introduced in State affairs twice this week, is scheduled for a hearing to make it unlawful to camp on the Capital Mall or around any other state owned building. There is a group that has tents around the old Ada County Courthouse that is across the street from the capital. We took some testimony from some "occupiers or 99 per centers" as they call themselves. One of the committee members asked a BSU student who spoke before the committee, what event would cause them to be satisfied so they would disband on their own. The fellow stammered a bunch but was unable to come up with an answer. Is it good idea to pass a bill that in effect would evict them from the property? From a PR perspective, probably

not. One thing for sure is that there will be no shortage of press coverage on this one and some of us are feeling like this is not a winner no matter how we vote.

Joint Finance is still hearing from agencies and their wish lists, that are in competition for the state's resources. Committees are dealing with the rules that have come forward since last session. Two years ago we put a resolution in place in an attempt to better define what would constitute a reason for new rules and to try to curb the explosive growth in rules from the agencies. For the last two years we have seen fewer rules instead of more. That's a good thing and we continue to be optimistic that we will see the cost of this process reduced. I think we can count that as a success. Again, maybe that is due to the stars lining up, or good luck or even coincidence. I'd rather call it success because of the efforts of a citizen of this state, who brought the idea to us.