Just fix the flippin’ roads (and bridges)!

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Hey Legislature: just fix the flippin’ roads!

If you’ve noticed a trend in our Sunday editorials lately — one stressing the importance of addressing Idaho’s urgent transportation needs — give yourself a gold star sticker. Heck, give yourself two of ‘em. We’ll shout it from the highest mountaintops if we have to, and we’ll keep shouting until something is done.

Three weeks into the 2015 Legislature, things aren’t looking so promising — at least, not yet. The only transportation-related legislation of significance introduced to date would allow even more heavy agriculture-related loads of up to 2,000 pounds, as well as refuse and sanitation trucks, to wear down Gem State blacktop with impunity.

And how, exactly, is this going to help generate more road-repair dollars and remedy the fact that heavy loads are underpaying while drivers of passenger vehicles are over-paying? Excellent question.

So what are your lawmakers busying themselves with right now? Abortion!!!!!! Gun rights!!!!!!! More symbolic golden oldies from Lynn Luker and the Time Wasters!!!!!! Hot-button, emotion-driven issues destined to have little practical impact on many Idahoans but equally destined to eat up hours and hours of time … leading to the inevitable spring crescendo of “Oops, we’re tired and we’re out of time, so we’ll deal with transportation next year.”

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This year’s foray into abortion would put new regulations for medically induced abortions, requiring counseling and an examination before medication is prescribed. Basically, it’s an attempt to put up obstacles that, in proponents’ eyes, would lead to fewer medically induced abortions.

Regardless of your feelings on this issue, it would only be a matter of time before such a law were struck down as unconstitutional. Love it or hate it, Roe vs. Wade remains the law. So all the time spent on testimony and the dollars spent defending such a law would ultimately be for naught.

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And what would a session of the Idaho Legislature be without a gun bill to satisfy those who think it’s just too darn hard to defend yourself in Famous Potato Land?
This year’s effort would allow any law-abiding resident to carry a gun without a concealed carry permit or formal training. Setting the merits of the constitutional debate aside, one can only wonder if the bill’s sponsors will demand documented evidence that Idahoans are dying in droves because our state’s restrictive gun laws have rendered them defenseless — much like many legislators demanded documented evidence showing the need for “Add the Words” additions to Idaho’s Human Rights Act.

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Which brings us to Luker, the Boise Republican House member who brought us last year’s ill-fated, poorly-written “religious freedom” bill. He already has two brand-spankin’ new hits on the charts this year: one would spend even more time probing the issue of student data collection; another would establish a procedure to select delegates to a constitutional convention.

Recall that last year, lawmakers passed a logical bill that put limits on what student data can and cannot be included on their academic records. Prohibited were medical records, Social Security numbers, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, gun ownership, etc.

Apparently that isn’t enough. Luker can’t say for sure what more needs to be done, but … well … something to placate Common Core opponents, so let’s create a task force to do it!
And you never know, there could be a constitutional convention any millennium now, so best be prepared.

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We would love to be proven wrong here. Maybe lawmakers have been meeting quietly behind closed doors and are working diligently on a plan to produce at least $250 million more annually to address our roads and bridges, a plan that would include a modest fuel tax increase and adjustment of vehicle registration fees to ensure more fairness for heavy vehicles.

If that’s the case, we’ll gladly eat some humble pie and lick our fingers afterward. Prove us wrong, please!

Until then, we won’t stop saying it: “Just fix the flippin’ roads!”

— Phil Bridges

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