

# Ferro: Beware the Reps' revenge

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If you're glad this year's Legislature has wrapped things up and gone home, you've got 12 Democrats to thank. The Legislature can't go home without passing the budget bills. And, this year, 22 of those bills passed the Idaho House by 12 votes or less. The majority of House Republicans voted against funding programs dealing with domestic violence, the women's prison, species conservation, energy and mineral resources, affordable workforce housing, full-day kindergarten, etc.

Twenty-two other programs could be suffering as the Library Commission is. A last-minute budget didn't pass, so cuts were made — and that budget also failed. Only after a huge pruning did Republicans pass a bill allowing the continued existence of the Commission.

That pruning included \$3.5 million in federal money to improve internet access in remote areas so Idahoans throughout the state could have virtual visits with healthcare providers.

Republican representatives saw the hundreds of Idahoans who would benefit from remote medical care as acceptable “collateral damage” to their efforts to show the harm they will do when angry.

And they were angry because the Library Association — not the commission itself— had opposed HB 666.

Supposedly, that bill would have placed librarians and teachers on even-footing with book dealers— they could be criminally charged for delivering “harmful materials including obscene depictions in movies, books, and other media” to minors.

But teachers and librarians are already subject to more censorship than bookstores. Their governing boards have forms for taking complaints and set procedures for evaluating questioned materials. Controversies occasionally heat up enough to make the press. Over the years Nampans have made headlines objecting to a children's book about a child with two mommies in a public library, to a Steinbach classic on a high school English department's recommended reading list, and to a high school library book imagining Shakespeare's life in merry old England.

I don't recall area bookstores coming under such scrutiny. As private businesses, they don't have to reveal how – or if – they evaluate books, but I do think the media would let us know if a bookstore employee was charged with putting “harmful materials” in the hands of a minor.

In fact, bookstores don't seem concerned whether a customer is a minor.

So I wasn't surprised that, when checking items labeled as "obscene" or "porn" during discussion, I found that item after item was not only available from Amazon and Barnes and Noble, but several were highly recommended. *Fun Home* was once *Time Magazine's* book of the year, and its author won a MacArthur award. Three different classroom study guides are available for *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*. Other titles have been starred in the *School Library Journal* or recommended by the American Library Association.

Now, if the supporters of HB 666 were really concerned about children being exposed to these books, you'd think they'd want the law enforced that currently makes "harmful items" illegal in bookstores. They could be sending minors into stores undercover to buy "harmful items" and providing the prosecution with videos.

They would still have to get a legal authority to agree that the materials were "harmful" and to charge the employee(s) responsible. I'm curious — would that be the buyer(s) for the store or merely the clerk at the counter? And what if the clerk were a minor?

But, no, HB 666 was merely the latest tool in Republican efforts to drive a wedge between voters and the public agencies they trust the most. If the Senate hadn't killed it, some extremists would now be harassing librarians as they have nurses and airline stewards.

Only two Republican representatives voted against HB 666.