

Motorcyclist helmet bill goes nowhere

Betsy Z. Russell The Spokesman-Review

Rep. Tom Trail, R-Moscow, says the Associated Students of the University of Idaho and several physicians asked him to propose legislation to reinstate Idaho's helmet law for all motorcyclists, which was passed in 1967 but repealed in 1978.

Only those under 18 are now required to wear helmets in Idaho. Three university students in Moscow have died in motorcycle accidents while helmetless, while a passenger wearing a helmet survived with minor injuries, Trail told the House Transportation Committee on Thursday.

"Wearing a helmet does save lives," Trail told lawmakers. Plus, he said, when motorcyclists don't wear helmets and suffer injuries, local counties or the state often get stuck with the medical bills.

Rep. Shirley Ringo, D-Moscow, moved to introduce Trail's bill, but Rep. Shirley McKague, R-Meridian, made a substitute motion to kill it without even allowing it a public hearing.

"I don't think Idaho is ready for the government to watch over us in every aspect of our lives, and the people that ride the motorcycles are old enough to decide," McKague said. "I believe it's an individual choice."

Rep. Ken Roberts, R-Donnelly, said he opposed the bill because it didn't allow an exemption for "agricultural uses of irrigation bikes."

Rep. Phil Hart, R-Athol, said: "It's my view that when government would require everyone to wear a helmet, that government's actually in the role of a parent. People over 18 can take care of themselves. I don't feel that I'm vested as a member of the Legislature with the ability to be someone's parent."

McKague's motion passed on a 7-5 vote, with both Hart and Rep. Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene, joining the majority. Ringo and Rep. Mary Lou Shepherd, D-Prichard, favored introducing the bill.

Trail said: "I'm disappointed because we've got a lot of people who were going to come in and testify in support of the legislation. I find it ironic that we have folks who voted against it, very conservative, watching the state tax dollars, and yet statistics show quite clearly that medical costs are paid by counties and states for folks not wearing helmets."