

Moscow won't alter discrimination policy

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City councilors here shot down a resolution Monday night to amend the city's nondiscrimination employment policy to specifically prohibit discrimination based on gender expression, identity or characteristics.

By a 5-1 vote, the majority of councilors agreed the city's current policy already protects people from such discrimination. The decision came despite impassioned testimony from people who said the amendment would lend comfort to transgendered people while reaffirming Moscow is an inclusive community that won't tolerate discrimination.

Councilor Tom Lamar's motion to adopt the resolution died for lack of a second. Councilor Walter Steed then moved to kill the resolution and was joined by councilors John Weber, Bill Lambert, Wayne Krauss and Dan Carscallen.

"I just don't see us having a problem," Weber said, "equal employment opportunity will be extended to all persons in all aspects of the employer-employee relationship."

"Maybe I'm just seeing the silver lining," Carscallen said, "but the city of Moscow believes all persons are entitled to equal employment opportunity and does not discriminate. That there says enough for me."

"It doesn't solve the problem of discrimination," Krauss said. "Discrimination is in the mind."

Moscow attorney Tim Gresback, speaking as a member of the Moscow Human Rights Commission, prefaced his comments by saying he was proud to be a member of such an inclusive community. "I'm proud to live in a town that has a mayor that's becoming a champion of civil rights, of human rights." Mayor Nancy Chaney proposed the change to city policy.

Gresback said the human rights commission unanimously encouraged the council to expand the present nondiscrimination employment policy to include gender expression and identity. "The human rights commission respectfully submits that specificity in the addition of gender identity and expression costs us nothing, but means everything to many."

A woman who identified herself as a lesbian and another who said she was the mother of an intersexed child, were among those who urged council members to pass the resolution. So did Joann Muneta, chairwoman of the Latah County Human Rights Task Force. "What we're asking, in this expansion of protection, is not going to affect the average citizen in Moscow," Muneta said. "But it does set an example for others." She said only five Idaho cities specifically protect people against discrimination based on sexual orientation. Moscow is one of those cities, and would enhance its reputation by including gender identity and expression.

City Supervisor Gary Riedner said he was confident the current city nondiscrimination employment policy protects gender identity and expression. He added, however, lending specificity to the policy wouldn't hurt.

Gresback explained last week between 1 percent to 3 percent of the population is transgendered. Such people have an internal gender identity that doesn't match their body parts. Of those, a small portion of people have surgery to alter their gender. Most opt against surgery. And of those, many choose to dress or appear more like the opposite sex.

"We've all met effeminate men. We've all met masculine females," Gresback said previously. He lauded all members for their steadfast opposition to any form of discrimination against anyone. "If this council, in its wisdom, does not consider an expansion appropriate, we do not consider that a human rights failure. Some conclude that present policy ... already prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender identity and expression."

Chaney agreed with Gresback. "We can be very proud of Moscow's record as an inclusive community, and the people who are so vigilant at demonstrating good examples here of compassion, tolerance and acceptance, human rights and civil rights across the board."