

She's news but can Robinson fix a pothole?

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JEERS to Melissa Sue Robinson. Give Robinson credit for adding some lift to a slow news week. A "male-to-female post-op transgendered person," Robinson says she will run for mayor of Nampa, one of Idaho's more conservative communities.

"I am running because I am progressive and I feel that Nampa is a city that needs progressive people in city government," says Robinson, who lists among her accomplishments founding the National Association for the Advancement of Transgendered Persons at Lansing, Mich., and Equality Idaho.

But the problem - as political historian Randy Stapilus noted - is Robinson's message. Other than spreading tolerance for gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgendered people, she doesn't have much to say about what kind of changes Nampa needs.

Nor has she had much relevant experience either in Idaho or in city politics.

Robinson's looking for a platform to promote tolerance. That's a worthwhile goal. But Nampa is one of Idaho's largest communities and it is facing economic as well as demographic change. Its concerns merit serious debate, not a political side-show, no matter how entertaining.

CHEERS to the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare. It has expanded the Women, Infants and Children program. Beginning July 1, a family of three can earn up to \$33,874, or 4 percent more, and qualify for WIC.

This state should do anything it can to help children at risk. A recent study of hunger in the United States says 20.2 percent of children younger than 5 don't know where their next meal is coming from.

WIC extends \$55 each month in vouchers to women who are pregnant, women who recently were pregnant, women who are breast feeding as well as infants and children up to 5 years of age. WIC also directs its clients toward nutritious food, something people who are on tight budgets often fail to accomplish. Vouchers go toward purchasing items such as milk, eggs, cheese, cereal and beans. WIC also assigns registered dieticians to counsel mothers and children.

WIC now serves 47,000 people in Idaho, which reflects an increase of 12 percent in a year's time.

JEERS to Nez Perce County Assessor Daniel Anderson. His assessment notices convey a slight increase in taxable property values within the city of Lewiston and Nez Perce County. So far, so good.

The problem is he puts more information on the notices than he should.

In the past, Anderson has resisted legislative directives to include on assessment notices estimated property taxes. He can't know how much tax someone will pay because local tax rates haven't been established. That happens later this summer and fall.

Some Idaho assessors have matched new assessments with year-old tax rates to compute the estimated tax bill. That's largely erroneous. Local budget increases are capped. So if property values escalate too much, tax rates will decline.

Consequently , many assessors have discontinued the practice of estimating taxes on assessment notices.

Here's the problem with Anderson's assessment form: It includes last year's taxes. Although not as great a transgression, it still leads to confusion. A casual observer can draw a correlation between the change in assessed value and his upcoming tax bill. The homeowner whose assessment jumped might get heartburn unnecessarily. And the property owner whose assessment dropped shouldn't expect a windfall.

CHEERS to Idaho and Washington members of Congress who joined in supporting tougher curbs on tobacco.

For the first time, the Food and Drug Administration will regulate what goes into a cigarette and other tobacco products, how those items are advertised and marketed.

Last week, Washington Democratic Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell as well as Idaho Republican Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch joined in the 79-17 vote to implement tougher FDA controls.

However, Idaho's Republican senators earlier joined 28 of their colleagues in voting against halting debate. Had that effort succeeded, it might have torpedoed the FDA tobacco bill.

U.S. Reps. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., Walt Minnick, D-Idaho, and Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, voted for the FDA measure when it first passed the House 298-112 April 2. Then last week Minnick and Simpson voted to concur with the Senate, which cleared the House 307 to 97. Hastings was not present.

CHEERS to Jerry Beck, president of the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls. With so much political posturing about congressional earmarks going on, it's refreshing to hear at least one person on the receiving line acknowledge the benefits.

Writing in the Twin Falls Times-News, Beck outlined \$2.2 million worth of earmarks that have improved CSI's traffic safety, will provide state-of-the-art equipment for the school's manufacturing technology training program and expand online education courses.

CHEERS to the Lava Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce. After Lava Hot Springs State Foundation Executive Director Mark Lowe denied a family discount to a gay couple and their three foster children - citing Idaho's 2006 constitutional amendment banning gay marriage - the chamber issued this statement:

"... We want all to know that we hope this isolated incident won't dissuade visitors from exploring and enjoying our community and, indeed, the rest of Idaho.

"The Lava Hot Springs Chamber of Commerce feels that all visitors are welcome in our community and we look forward to showing them our Idaho hospitality."

Good for them. - M.T.

