

## Where's Norm?

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Semanko...

JEERS ... to Idaho Republican Party Chairman Norm Semanko. Segments of his party are invading the nonpartisan city elections. Why isn't he discouraging it?

In Bonneville County, the Republican Party has endorsed Idaho Falls City Council candidate Alex Creek and given him \$1,000. Twin Falls Republicans also toyed with the idea of endorsing candidates.

Idaho keeps partisan politics out of its city elections deliberately. There is no Republican or Democratic way to fix a pothole or maintain a park.

And do you really want the kind of partisanship that has polarized national and state politics to next roll over city councilors and mayors? What's next? Electing city councilors based on whether they support Idaho GOP platform positions against abortion and the Federal Reserve?

Idaho Democrats have steered clear of playing this game. Of course, the Democratic label is a liability in some circles. Having the elephant on his campaign signs may give a city council candidate a boost.

This is a bad precedent. If the tactic elects Creek, where will the Republicans strike next? Lewiston's 2011 city elections? Moscow's?

So what's more important here? What's good for Idaho's communities? Or what's good for the Idaho GOP?

Semanko ought to know. He's seeking re-election to the Eagle City Council - a non-partisan post.

JEERS ... to the Idaho Public Charter School Commission. Sure, the panel responsible for many of Idaho's charter schools has gotten tougher in its dealings with the Nampa Classical Academy.

Of late.

The commission is delving into allegations of nepotism, whether the teachers and administrators are qualified, how money is being spent and the connection between the charter school's governing board and a company building the school.

And Friday, when Nampa Classical Academy did not respond to a series of commission questions, the panel issued a notice of defect, the first step in a process that could lead to the school's closing.

But how did Nampa Classical Academy obtain the charter commission's certification in the first place? Almost from the minute it got a green light, this operation has been acting as if it could spend public tax dollars anyway it sees fit - such as designating the Bible as a text, despite a state constitutional ban on mixing religion and publicly funded education.

Now that Nampa Classical Academy has everyone's attention, it's drawing scrutiny. But what else don't we know?

CHEERS ... to Asotin City Councilors Vikki Bonfield and John Kirkland. Like other local governments in the valley, Asotin is poised to cancel its mutual aid agreement with the city of Clarkston, whose leaders seem locked toward a Quixotic drive to create a duplicative ambulance service.

Asotin's leaders were about to terminate the agreement when Bonfield suggested Mayor Jim Miller first personally deliver the news to Clarkston Mayor Donna Engle. Kirkland agreed.

"In reality, " Miller said. "They already know."

True, but what's the harm of employing a thread courtesy? There's been far too little of that across the valley this summer and fall.

JEERS ... to Gov. C. L. (Butch) Otter. Will somebody explain why he continues to encourage Idaho State University President Arthur Vailas' fantasy of building a medical school?

Speaking in Pocatello earlier this month, Otter said: "I think if we keep polishing it long enough, it will start to shine."

Where's the money? Under Otter and the GOP Legislature, Idaho has cut its state support for higher education by 20 percent in 12 months - enough money to fund Lewis-Clark State College's state appropriation for three years.

If a medical school is such a great idea, why has the State Board of Education decided against it? In order to expand the ranks of physicians in the Gem State, the board wants to obtain more medical school seats through the Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, Idaho cooperative. That step, as well as expanding the Idaho-based residency programs, is a reasonable, cost-effective answer to Idaho's doctor shortage.

CHEERS ... to the Lewiston City Council. It has dropped a plan that would have extorted people to pay for sidewalks elsewhere in town.

In the decades since Lewiston gave developers and home builders a "postponement" on mandated curb, gutter and sidewalk improvements, three quarters of the 600 homes involved have changed hands. The new owners had no idea they'd be obligated to install the improvements. In lieu of that, the council considered allowing them to pay a third of the construction costs into a pot that would pay for building sidewalks along more heavily-traveled corridors.

The council was right to scrap the plan. In its place, the council may hold accountable the 164 homeowners who actually signed sidewalk postponement agreements. Those homeowners either could make the required improvements or contribute the equivalent of 75 percent of the costs toward sidewalks elsewhere in town. As the same terms already apply to other homeowners, it's only fair.

CHEERS ...to former Lewiston City Councilor and Nez Perce County Commissioner J.R. Van Tassel. The Idaho Association of Counties has named him the recipient of its highest honor, the H. Sydney Duncombe Award. The award was named after the University of Idaho political scientist who literally wrote the training manual for county officials. In Van Tassel's case, it recognized his work in helping to devise a self-insured medical plan for government workers.

A county commissioner for 13 years, Van Tassel also served seven years on the Lewiston City Council.- M.T.