

Going Rogue

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Rob McKenna...



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JEERS ... to Washington Attorney General Rob

McKenna. He just wedded the Evergreen State to a lawsuit challenging the health care reform President Obama just signed into law. Twelve states, including Idaho, are parties to the lawsuit.

McKenna, a Republican, has the technical authority to take that step. But does he have the moral right?

Who is he representing?

Not Democratic Gov. Chris Gregoire, who supports the Obama package and will file a legal brief to counter McKenna. "He cannot be a Lone Ranger," she said.

Not the state's two Democratic U.S. senators. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell voted for the reform package.

He doesn't reflect the state's delegation in the U.S. House. Its six Democratic members voted for the health care package Sunday. Washington's three GOP House members, including Cathy McMorris Rodgers, voted no.

Nor the people of Washington. The state already subsidizes health care for the working poor. A majority of live births are publicly funded. The state is on track toward making certain every child either has public or private health care insurance. When federal health care insurance subsidies kick in, the state may get some financial relief.

McKenna is swinging to the fringe of his own party and engaging in tea party rhetoric about states' rights. Washington's normally reasonable attorney general is starting to sound like Sarah Palin.

CHEERS ... to Washington Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown, D-Spokane.

What can you do if a Republican attorney general goes AWOL on a health care reform package his Democratic-leaning state's leadership supports?

Cut off the dollars.

And that's just what Brown proposes. She's among legislative Democrats who want to pass a budget proviso barring McKenna from spending one dime of state money on his legal challenge to the newly passed national health care bill.

"We're looking at that," Brown told the Seattle Times. McKenna's lawsuit is "far outside the mainstream interests" of the state.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden. He's also standing alone against the political establishment in his state. But here's the difference: He's doing it on behalf of ordinary Idahoans.

Wasden is suing the Idaho Land Board because it kowtowed to a bunch of wealthy cabin site tenants rather than protect public school and college students of this state, something Idaho's constitution requires.

Wasden is a member of the Land Board.

He's also a Republican, as are the other four members of that board - Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter, Secretary of State Ben Ysursa, Controller Donna Jones and Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Luna.

So give Wasden points for independence and guts.

Wasden and Jones were on the losing side last week when Otter, Ysursa and Luna compromised with people who rent 521 state-owned cottage sites at Priest and Payette lakes. They pay so little that the state has been collecting a return of 1.7 percent on an investment worth \$252 million.

That yields about \$4.3 million to endowments funding public schools, Lewis-Clark State College, Idaho State University and State Hospital South at Blackfoot.

Analysts say the state should be getting between 4 percent and 6 percent. That would bring in between \$10 million and \$15 million.

The state constitution is unambiguous. The Land Board is obligated to get the maximum return. Wasden pushed for a 6 percent rate.

Instead, Otter, Ysursa and Luna settled for a plan that would bring rents up to 2.6 percent of lot values in five years - assuming, of course, that the worth of those lots doesn't rise in that time.

They even admitted the package falls short.

Incredibly, lobbyists for the Priest and Payette lake site lease holders threatened to sue. Wasden beat them to it. He wants the Idaho Supreme Court to block the new leases and compel the Land Board to raise rents to a market-based rate.

JEERS ... to former Idaho Congressman Bill Sali, R-Idaho. Last week, he reminded everyone why he's not been missed. First he tried to undermine a measure to improve Idaho's last-place ranking for child immunizations.

Idaho operates a registry reminding parents when immunization shots come due. A parent has to "opt in" to participate. Lawmakers are considering a bill that would automatically enroll parents in the registry unless they "opt" out. Children of overworked and distracted parents who can lose track of immunization schedules may suffer because of Sali's narrow political agenda.

Then, Sali endorsed state Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Eagle, to challenge the man who ousted him two years ago, Congressman Walt Minnick, D-Idaho. Because Vaughn Ward, Labrador's main competition for the Republican nomination, has never held elective office, sending him to Washington would be like "sending a Boy Scout to Iraq," Sali said.

In 2006, Ward actually led a combat tour in Fallujah, Iraq, and was awarded the Bronze Star.

While ward was in Iraq, Sali was picking on women. In a state House floor debate, Sali linked abortion to breast cancer, a remark that reduced Rep. Wendy Jacquet, D-Ketchum, to tears. Jacquet is a breast cancer survivor. All of which provoked then-House Speaker Bruce Newcomb, R-Burley, to declare Sali "an absolute idiot."

JEERS ... to Idaho House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star, and Rep. Marv Hagedorn, R-Meridian. They've introduced their long-promised bill to cut income tax rates on individuals and corporations. It signals their intent to drain \$37 million a year from Idaho's crippled budget until the state is out \$374 million annually by the 10th year.

Since the recession began two years ago, Idaho's schools, college and university programs, health care and other services lost almost \$600 million. Gov. C. L. (Butch) Otter's revenue forecast shows the state won't recover enough money to repair the damage for another four years. If Moyle and Hagedorn prevail, it never will. - M.T.