

Top ten reasons megaloaders sealed Idaho's deal

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Of course, the Western Legacy Alliance thought it perfectly OK to feature the Idaho flag and state seal in its newspaper advertising promoting megaloads.

Why wouldn't it?

Idaho's officialdom has stood firmly allied with plans to haul operating equipment along U.S. Highway 12 bound for the oil sands project of Alberta, Canada. When the pro-business group confiscated the state seal in ads that popped up in the June 14 Lewiston Tribune and every other daily newspaper across Idaho, many shrugged it off.

But not everybody. Some began asking if using a state seal was appropriate.

"The guidelines are that the seal be used in good taste, without alteration and without the intent to mistakenly convey state of Idaho sponsorship, endorsement or approval of a product or service," Secretary of State Ben Ysursa's office responded.

So where would Western Legacy Alliance get such a notion that it was entitled to the state's imprimatur in the first place?

With apologies to David Letterman, here are the Top Ten reasons:

- No. 10 - Gubernatorial welcome. Gov. C. L. (Butch) Otter's January 2009, letter endorsed the initial ExxonMobil plans to send more than 200 megaloads from the Port of Lewiston up U.S. Highway 12 to Montana. "We believe your prospective clients will be impressed by Idaho's 'can do' spirit, pro-business climate and the port's capabilities," Otter wrote, at least a year before the transport plans became commonly known.
- No. 9 - Congressional follow-up. On Feb. 5, 2009, Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, both R-Idaho, then-Congressman Walt Minnick, D-Idaho, and Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, wrote: "Please accept this letter as the congressional delegation's intent to work with ExxonMobil, Imperial Oil and the Port of Lewiston to develop this shipping route."
- No. 8 - Cash. During the past three years, Crapo and Risch sought a few million dollars to expand the port's capacity to handle megaload shipments. "As the most inland port on the West Coast, the port is in discussions with Exxon, Conoco, Shell and other companies for moving heavy lift cargo into the U.S. Midwest and

- to the Kearl Oil Sands in Alberta, Canada," the port's appropriations application read.
- No. 7 - State cops. In June 2009 - again, before the public was aware of it - Otter, Ysursa and Attorney General Lawrence Wasden, acting as the Board of Examiners, approved the use of Idaho State Police to accompany the huge transports.
 - No. 6 - Short notice. The Idaho Transportation Department authorized U.S. 12 improvements to assist the megaloads long before anybody knew of the project.
 - No. 5 - Telling, not asking you. When the ITD got around to holding public forums during the summer of 2010, local residents were notified, but not consulted, about the project.
 - No. 4 - Come to Boise, if you can. After the courts dragged ITD into a more formal contested rule-making hearing, it held those sessions in Boise, not Lewiston, Moscow or Orofino.
 - No. 3 - Slam dunk. The megaload companies - first ConocoPhillips and now ExxonMobil - are winning the rounds in the ITD hearings. Just recently, the ITD got rid of a requirement that large loads pull over and let traffic pass every 10 minutes.
 - No. 2 - Your money or your life. Thanks to state Rep. Dick Harwood, R-St. Maries, any group that challenges one of these megaloads in court is going to flirt with bankruptcy. Passed by the Legislature and signed into law by Otter, Harwood's bill says a judge can force plaintiffs to put a bond equal to 10 percent of a megaload's value.
 - And the No. 1 reason - CLOUT. The Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry, the Idaho Farm Bureau and the Food Producers of Idaho are members of the pro-megaload lobby DriveOurEconomy.org. Last anyone checked, the Legislature practically was a wholly-owned subsidiary of these special interests, not the other way around.

Add it up and you've got the state's seal of approval. What's a puny state seal compared to that?- M.T.