

Playing chicken

Marty Trillhaase The Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to U.S. Reps. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., Raul Labrador and Mike Simpson, both R-Idaho. The country is down to 10 days before defaulting on the debt and they - along with the GOP House majority - insist on playing politics.

Tuesday, the House voted 234-190 to impose draconian budget cuts on the poor and working class while shielding the wealthy from any new taxes.

In exchange for agreeing to boost the debt ceiling and avoid a financial catastrophe, the GOP insists upon a balanced budget amendment. Not much chance of any of that happening before Aug. 2.

Nor should it. If this were the clean balanced budget amendment the non-partisan Concord Coalition embraced back in the 1990s, it would authorize deficits in case of natural disasters, serious economic disruptions or large-scale military commitments. Instead, the GOP version would make it nearly impossible to raise taxes or borrow money, throwing the entire weight of the deficit on social programs and entitlements.

Come two weeks from now, if the debt ceiling cracks and your retirement portfolio takes another tumble, remember who to blame.

CHEERS ... to U.S. Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho. Along with "Gang of Six" Republicans Saxby Chambliss of Georgia and Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, and Democrats Dick Durbin of Illinois, Mark Warner of Virginia and Ken Conrad of North Dakota, Crapo struck a budget deal to shave nearly \$4 trillion in deficits - \$3 trillion in spending cuts and \$1 trillion in repealed tax subsidies on such things as mortgage interest and tax credits for families with children.

Shared sacrifice may secure enough Republicans and Democrats to pass something, but it buys the enmity of anti-tax extremists. Expect the rigid right to inflict some pain on Crapo before it's over.

JEERS ... to Valley County Prosecutor Matthew C. Williams. Every step he takes in the case of Nez Perce County Commissioner Michael A. Grow is cloaked in secrecy.

Last week, Williams eschewed an open preliminary hearing in favor of a closed-door grand jury setting. If this has happened before in the history of Valley County, nobody's aware of it. After the grand jury indicted Grow on a felony sexual assault charge, Williams sat on it.

Four days later, the story came to light.

Williams is the same prosecutor who unilaterally sealed off portions of Grow's criminal case file - despite a state law that assigns such authority to a judge. Hardly the kind of behavior that inspires confidence in Williams or the Valley County courts.

JEERS ... to the Idaho Republican Central Committee. Idaho is mired in high unemployment, a real estate bust and state budget problems. What does the GOP say about any of this?

Oh, nothing. It's too busy chasing bogeymen.

As approved by the central committee session in Moscow last weekend, here are some of the GOP's latest priorities:

- Get the Environmental Protection Agency out of the Silver Valley. Ask how much to clean up and how much to spend, and you'll get a debate. Go this far, however, and the cleanup could be undermined entirely.
- Shackle schools to one election a year to pass a bond or levy. There will be no second chances.
- Repudiate Senate Majority Caucus Chairman John McGee, R-Caldwell. Sure, McGee famously got drunk outside a Boise golf course, then took an SUV and trailer, wrecked it and passed out in the back seat. Hardly exemplary behavior. But where's the outrage with state Rep. Phil Hart, R-Athol, who stole timber from public lands and continues to avoid paying his taxes? Where's the umbrage with Rep. Tom Loertscher, R-Iona, who is accused of using his State Affairs Committee chairmanship to kill a bill that would have complicated his right-of-way claims in Bonneville County? Who's complaining about former Tax Commission Chairman Royce Chigbrow, who used his office to reward friends and punish enemies? Don't forget, this political machine said not one word about Sen. Larry Craig's toe-tapping scandal.
- Block the Idaho Land Board from following its constitutional mandate to manage the Idaho endowment assets for the maximum benefit of Idaho's school children, college students and state hospitals. If doing so injects endowment assets into the private marketplace - which has been going on since statehood - then the GOP says schools, colleges and hospitals will just have to suffer.
- Rather than defining spent nuclear fuel rods as waste, the GOP wants it viewed as an asset to be used for "nuclear fuel manufacturing" - or in other words reprocessing - in violation of Idaho's nuclear waste cleanup agreement. All together now: Let's make Idaho the nation's nuclear waste dump. We're open for business.
- Declares the right to carry a weapon "at all times, in all places" - including college campuses but presumably also churches, airports, prisons, schools, your neighbor's house, hospitals, federal and state courthouses, day cares and private businesses - to be inviolate.

GOP leaders forgot about you.

CHEERS ... to U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho. As Dave Adler, director of the James A. and Louise McClure Center for Public Policy Research noted last week, Risch used his seat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to ask: Does Barack Obama believe, as he said in 2007, that the president "does not have the power under the Constitution to unilaterally authorize a military attack in a situation that does not involve stopping an actual or imminent threat to the nation" or not?

Of course, candidate Obama's statement doesn't square with President Obama's decision to launch hostilities against Libya without congressional approval.

Risch put that point to State Department legal adviser Harold Koh - and like the tough lawyer he is, Risch wouldn't let Koh dance around it. Said Koh, Obama's 2007 statement was "too limited." - M.T.

© 2011 The Lewiston Tribune. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.