

Oink oink

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[Oink oink](#) Marty Trillhaase The Lewiston Tribune | [5 comments](#)

JEERS ... to Idaho Republican Party Chairman Norm Semanko. For the poor schmucks who buy his malarkey, Semanko is all about getting "back to the basics; less government intrusion in our lives, more personal responsibilities and individual rights."

When your back is turned, Semanko is busy gobbling up your taxes.

It's not enough that the Idaho Water Users Association - a nonprofit group that draws some of its money from cities, irrigation districts and water districts - pays Semanko \$160,000 a year to serve as its executive director.

The nonprofit also holds a loan on his Boise home. It started out as bridge loan for \$136,000 a decade ago. Since then, Semanko borrowed another \$40,000 and today he owes \$161,305.

Even in Idaho - which is becoming accustomed, if not downright desensitized, to the muck of Republican cronyism - this cozy arrangement reeks of self-dealing. Nonprofits such as the Idaho Association of Counties, the Association of Idaho Cities and the Idaho Association of Highway Districts don't engage in this behavior. One suspects the conservative wing of Semanko's party would be the first to complain if they did.

Instead, they elected him GOP chairman and may install Semanko as Eagle's next mayor.

It's not the only whiff of financial impropriety clinging to Semanko. As the Idaho Statesman noted, he defaulted on another house mortgage in 2008 because he failed to make the payment for five months. Two payday loan companies also came looking for their money.

In public, Semanko espouses probity.

In private, he knows only one phrase: "Gimme. Gimme. Gimme."

JEERS ... to Jason Kreizenbeck, Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's chief of staff, who is departing for the greener pastures inhabited by Idaho's corporate influence peddlers.

In the process, he sold you out. The only question is when.

Like a long line of Idaho GOP apparatchiks who got comfortable working for politicians - Kreizenbeck has been pulling down \$130,000 the past four years in Otter's shop - he intends to get positively wealthy shilling for lobbyist Skip Smyser.

Idaho is among a handful of states that places absolutely no impediments in the way of public officials walking through the revolving door and using the contacts and expertise they gained in government service on behalf of a private company.

So Kreizenbeck will get his phone calls to state agencies returned for the remaining three years of Otter's second term. But did you ever stop to consider how he lined up this gig?

Smyser is the political fixer for some big operators working for the state. Do you think Kreizenbeck ignored that during the weeks - if not months - he and his new associate negotiated their new venture?

Smyser works for ConocoPhillips. Did the issue of megaloads heading down U.S. Highway 12 cross Kreizenbeck's desk at the governor's office?

How about Corrections Corporation of America, another Smyser client? Just a few weeks ago, CCA admitted it had not lived up to its contract with the state, thereby allowing the inmates in its care to be brutalized. Who - his prospective clients or the victims of Idaho's "gladiator school" - was Kreizenbeck identifying with?

Smyser represents Apangea Learning Inc., of Pittsburgh and Education Networks of America of Nashville, Tenn. - players in the online instruction game. Could that explain the governor's right-hand guy advocating Idaho's glide path toward forcing every high school student to take two online classes?

Add to the list the makers of Marlboro cigarettes and the management firm that fouled up Idaho's Medicaid billing system.

Well, you get the picture.

CHEERS ... to Janie Richards, Asotin city attorney. On the job just a few months, this feisty lawyer started digging into the Asotin Police Chief Bill Derbonne's questions about reimbursing the regional emergency dispatch service known as Whitcom.

Asotin County signs a multiyear contract, and in turn bills the subdivisions.

Richards began sifting through contracts. She pored over meeting minutes. She tracked financial statements through the treasurer and auditor offices. She even conducted interviews.

Here's what she found: Asotin County is paying Whitcom about \$159,135 a year. It then turns around and charges Clarkston \$198,611. The Asotin County Fire District is paying another \$7,500.

What's going on here? Has somebody become sloppy - or deceptive?

JEERS ... to Lewiston City Councilor Matthew Carlson. Three weeks before the Nov. 8 city election is no time to quit. Yet Carlson has decided to pull out of the campaign.

He says holding office will get in the way of his career plans.

Couldn't he have decided that before the filing deadline - or even the Sept. 23 withdrawal date? Now his name remains on the ballot, so if he gets elected in spite of himself, Carlson will be sworn in, help elect a mayor and then be replaced by appointee.

By not campaigning, Carlson may hand Taxpayers Against Unfair Taxation candidates Clinton Daniel and Ged Randall an election they might otherwise not have won.

CHEERS ... to U.S. District Judge Benjamin Settle of Tacoma. In opening public access to the petitions that placed Referendum 71 on the 2009 Washington ballot, Settle enhances Washington's four-decade tradition of transparency in government.

Backers of R-71, an unsuccessful drive to repeal Washington's all-but-gay marriage law, argued they'd face retaliation if the petition signatures were released - as are all initiative petitions.

But the U.S. Supreme Court said they'd have to prove they faced real duress before the documents could be sealed. Settle - who expressed sympathy for traditional marriage supporters - said the R-71 advocates had not.

Ironically, the names of people who contributed money to the R-71 campaign have been a matter of public record for two years - with no reports of anybody being harassed. - M.T.