

# In Sali we trust

Marty Trillhaase

JEERS ... to former Congressman Bill Sali, R-Idaho. For sheer audacity, Sali has few rivals. On Wednesday, he cornered the market on God.

Sali walked into the House Transportation Committee and asked the state to create, finance and market a new vanity license plate with the motto "In God We Trust."

He wants \$22 from each \$35 plate and \$12 from each renewal sold allocated to a nonprofit group he formed two weeks ago. Joining Sali on the board of American Heritage Foundation are his wife, Terry, and his nephew, Travis Pascoe of Nampa. With the money, Sali promises to educate the public about "foundational principles and history of the United States."

Wasn't it just last month that legislative auditors discovered Treasurer Ron Crane siphoning \$10,000 from his office account into a "Smart Women, Smart Money Conference" hosted by a nonprofit owned by Crane himself?

Wasn't it just Friday that the Senate voted 31-2 to limit future vanity plates while imposing more accountability about how the money is spent? This whole idea of converting what should be a vehicle registration and identification device into a glorified bumper sticker forces the state to track and distribute \$1.6 million to 30 groups.

But House Transportation Committee members killed that bill. So you'll just have to trust Sali.

Never mind that much of what Sali intends to distribute - such as copies of the U.S. Constitution - is available for free on the Internet, at the public library or the secretary of state's office.

What Sali wants, Sali gets. The House Transportation Committee introduced his bill.

How about keeping the plot and changing the cast?

Instead of a conservative Republican, let's have former Illinois Democratic Gov. Rod Blagojevich pursue a new vanity plate with the motto: "Fly the flag."

Suppose he wants to encourage children to learn more about the Stars and Stripes.

Say he proposes to allocate 70 percent of the receipts to a nonprofit he formed Jan. 25, naming himself and his brother, Robert Blagojevich, as directors.

And for the sake of argument, assume that Blagojevich's party controls 12 of the Transportation Committee's 15 seats.

What would Idaho Republicans say then?

~~JEERS ... to Whitman County Commissioners Greg Partch and Patrick O'Neill.~~

They've committed the county to hand over \$15 million it doesn't have to the Hawkins Development Co. mall project.

They just returned empty-handed from Olympia, where they ventured in hopes of a bailout.

When it comes to defending themselves in court, however, they have all the money in the world.

The Organization to Void Illegal Conduct filed suit last month challenging the Hawkins deal. Among its contentions: Commissioners violated the state's open meetings law.

Normally, the task of defending the county falls to Prosecutor Denis Tracy. But the more Tracy made it known he had problems with the Hawkins subsidy, the more Partch and O'Neill shut him down.

Now Partch and O'Neill say they don't want Tracy anywhere near their defense. They've asked taxpayers to get them a new attorney. Commissioner Michael Largent voted no.

Public attorneys advise the policymakers. Sometimes that advice is followed. Sometimes, it's not. Either way, the attorney defends the policy makers in court.

Partch and O'Neill will spend at least \$50,000. They've made a bad bet, and now they're doubling down.

CHEERS ... to Asotin County Commissioners Jim Jeffords and Brian Shinn. If Clarkston city councilors insist upon taxing people for a family aquatic center they're not getting, it will be clear to all.

Monday, Jeffords and Shinn gathered an overflow town hall meeting at the aquatic center. Usually when elected officials call a public meeting, they risk getting yelled at.

This time, however, the audience yelled with the commissioners. What Jeffords and Shinn have been saying is resonating: The only reason Clarkston is able to collect and keep 85 percent of a 0.3 percent sales tax surcharge is because the county sought the hike to pay for the under-funded aquatic center in the first place.

But the city went back on the deal and over time diverted most of its share of sales tax receipts toward other projects.

Now the city plans to keep it all, possibly forcing the county to close the aquatic center's outdoor park this summer.

JEERS ... to the Idaho House Health and Welfare Committee. Led by such luminaries as Rep. Steve Thayn, R-Emmett, the panel opposed spending Medicaid money to help pregnant women and mothers of young children quit cigarettes.

Where were Thayn and the six House members who voted with him when it was demonstrated how smoking jeopardizes the unborn - contributing to low birth weight and premature births?

How did they miss report after report about second-hand smoke leading to respiratory infections in young children?

Have they forgotten the costs? Helping a pregnant woman quit smoking and deliver a healthy baby is far cheaper to taxpayers than dealing with the consequences of a premature birth.

Once again, these Idaho Republicans have become mesmerized by their anti-federal, anti-Obama zeal. If a federal rule says it's a good idea to spend Medicaid dollars weaning young mothers from cigarettes, there's only one thing for a Ruby Red State Idahoan to do:

Vote no.

Harming the unborn?

Making young children sick?

Squeezing the taxpayer?

It's just another day in the Idaho Capitol. - M.T.