

One-month wonder

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JEERS ... to former U.S. Rep. Jay Inslee, D-Wash. Taxpayers in Asotin, Whitman, Garfield and 33 other counties will pay \$1 million to elect someone to hold Inslee's 1st Congressional District seat - for one month. Inslee created this mess when he quit to pursue the governor's office.

In Washington, a congressional resignation triggers an election to fill the vacancy. The only question is timing. If the resignation comes more than eight months before the general election - March 6 - then a special election is held. In this case, it would have been set for the summer.

But Inslee waited until March 20, which guaranteed no Republican would win a special election in the summer.

Had Inslee delayed his departure past Washington's May 18 candidacy filing deadline, the office would remain vacant until next year. Now, however, along with electing someone to a new two-year term in the Nov. 6 election, voters will pick someone to serve out the remaining weeks of the old term.

Typically, the person elected for the full term merely takes the oath of office a little earlier. But redistricting shifted the boundaries of Inslee's district. So it takes a special election involving one group of voters to name a representative from Inslee's old district and the regular election with a new group of voters to pick someone to serve the new district.

King, Snohomish and Kitsap counties are entitled to \$770,000 from the state to cover their extra costs. Secretary of State Sam Reed's office expects explaining all this to voters via a post card will run another \$225,000.

Democrats are accusing Reed - a Republican and co-chairman of GOP gubernatorial candidate Rob McKenna's Thurston County campaign - of playing politics.

So who called for the special election?

Democratic Gov. Chris Gregoire.

Who forwarded the cost estimates?

Auditors from King, Snohomish and Kitsap counties, all Democrats.

Reed wasn't involved. He delegated the matter to his state elections co-director, Katie Blinn.

JEERS ... to Thomas Robb of Harrison, Ark., national director of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan. Why did at least eight Idaho lawmakers - including the state's sole black legislator, Rep. Cherie Buckner-Webb, D-Boise - receive an invitation to join the KKK?

Also finding the KKK literature in their mailbox were state Reps. Shirley Ringo, D-Moscow, and Tom Trail, R-Moscow.

"That's a standard piece of literature that is duplicated quite regularly," Robb told the Moscow-Pullman Daily News. "We have members do that, we have supporters do that. Sometimes we have people who aren't members or supporters that do that because they think it's funny. ... It certainly was not officially coming from us. We don't have time to do that."

If not distribution, he's responsible for manufacturing this template of hate. Take a whiff: "We believe that the founders of the Ku Klux Klan were led by divine providence and that once again, just like the Klan saved the white race during 'reconstruction,' it will arise like the great phoenix - to bring our people from the brink of destruction."

For \$35, you can join, provided you are "a white Christian man or woman ... not married to a nonwhite ... do not date nonwhites nor ... have nonwhite dependents. ..."

CHEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. Appearing on "Meet the Press" Sunday, Labrador took the path not typically traveled by an American politician of either party: He complained about religious persecution against Muslims.

What triggered the discussion was the old canard that President Obama is a Muslim.

"You know, I personally don't believe he's a Muslim," Labrador said. "He has told us that he's a Christian and I believe him. ... But it wouldn't matter if he is. ... What we need to look at is the policies. ... It's not what his religion is."

What makes that statement remarkable is how few people in public life are willing to say that. The last one was former Secretary of State Colin Powell.

JEERS ... to state Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood. She's unhappy that Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter is leading a trade delegation to China. Nuxoll doesn't want Otter attracting Chinese investment to the Gem State.

"People are still concerned about the China issue," she said. "They do not share the same principles and values we do."

OK, take a breath, Sen. Nuxoll, and then do some homework.

The 15 members of this delegation picked the site based on their own interests. They're free to travel to China - or anywhere else - on their own at any time. Many already have. Bringing the state's highest elected official along can open some doors, however.

These companies - which include BioTracking LLC of Moscow and Idaho Forest Group of Coeur d'Alene - want to sell goods. They're seeking markets, not investors. But even if they were, that's not up to Otter. Blame the feds. They set trade policy.

CHEERS ... to Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest Supervisor Rick Brazell. Given the scope of the Upper Lochsa land swap, \$1 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund won't make much difference. To acquire some 40,000 acres of logged-over land owned by Western Pacific Timber, the Forest Service may need \$25 million to \$40 million. Without cash, that means swapping forestland in the Palouse and the Panhandle or in Idaho County that are now publicly owned.

But \$1 million enables the Forest Service to buy some of the Upper Lochsa land outright. The appropriation also is an icebreaker. Once Congress invests in a project, it's likely to maintain the commitment in the future. Brazell applied for the grant. His request ended up 30th on a list of 30. - M.T.