

Sleepwalking

Posted: Friday, June 22, 2012 12:00 am | Updated: 6:52 pm, Thu Jun 21, 2012.

Marty Trillhaase, Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. Remember all those bold words about urging his own Republican Party to reverse the closed primary election that drove voters away?

Just how does the governor plan to accomplish that with a new party chairman who backed closing the primary in the first place?

As the state GOP convention convenes in Twin Falls today, two people are seeking the post being vacated by GOP Chairman Norm Semanko - the fellow who toppled Otter's own choice for top Republican, Kirk Sullivan, four years ago: former Elmore County Commissioner Barry Peterson and charter school advocate Gayann DeMordaunt.

Says Peterson: "If you're on the Republican team, you should be the ones choosing your candidate."

Says DeMordaunt: "I was definitely an early advocate of closed primaries, and I believe we can massage it to make it work for all Idaho Republicans."

Says Otter: "I was hoping to avoid a floor fight, but I gave both of them the green light."

OK, given the dysfunctional GOP's Tea Party infection, Otter would have had a challenge on his hands pushing someone who supports reopening the primary. But this business of making half-hearted efforts, then turning tail and running away in the face of resistance is becoming a pattern.

CHEERS ... to Dennis Mansfield of Boise. He's the firebrand who in 1998 predicted Gov. Phil Batt's veto of an anti-abortion bill meant his legacy would "be the blood that dripped off his elbow." These days, Mansfield offers a calm, contrasting voice to his former Idaho colleague, Bryan Fischer.

Host of the American Family Association's talk radio program "Focal Point," Fischer intimidated GOP presumptive nominee Mitt Romney into ditching his national security spokesman Richard Grenell, who is openly gay. Idahoans remember Fischer as a former state Senate chaplain and executive director of the Idaho Values Alliance.

Both in Jane Mayer's New Yorker profile of Fischer and then again in his own blog, Mansfield bemoans Fischer's intolerance.

"Debating the rightness or wrongness of homosexuality in our culture is something that Bryan Fischer is actively engaged in, and has been for over a decade. You know what? I

used to be there, too. The term 'righteous anger' would have been an appropriate term to describe the ferocity with which I would debate this issue, and others," Mansfield wrote. "The problem is that it doesn't work. Somebody who yells and screams makes for great entertainment, but little else. I've found that it is exponentially more difficult to shut my mouth, and listen. It is also exponentially more rewarding."

JEERS ... to U.S. Reps. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., Raul Labrador and Mike Simpson, both R-Idaho. They were among 216 Republican and 16 Democratic House members who just voted to gut most of the nation's environmental laws.

At issue is a bill giving the Border Patrol the ability to pretty much do whatever it pleases within 100 miles of the Mexican and Canadian borders.

Put on hold are the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Clean Air Act, the Wilderness Act, the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the National Forest Management Act, the Migratory Bird Treaty Act and the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Plus the Department of Homeland Security can construct roads, fences, forward operating bases and use motorized equipment virtually anywhere on federal and tribal lands. Conservationists say this puts the Olympic National Forest and North Cascades National Park in Washington as well as Glacier National Park in Montana at risk.

Homeland Security didn't ask for this authority and the Government Accountability Office told Congress environmental laws hadn't impinged on border security. What you have is an extreme anti-environmental agenda lurking beneath a veneer of national security.

CHEERS ... to R.Y.O. Machine, LLC, an Ohio corporation. To preserve its loophole, R.Y.O. may have put anti-tax guru Tim Eyman in a box.

Washington's cigarette taxes created this company's market. When it rolls cigarettes on site, R.Y.O. is able to pass along the state's much lower tax on loose tobacco. The savings could come to more than \$30 a carton.

When lawmakers eliminated the tax break, R.Y.O. sued in Franklin County. It contends the new tax is illegal because it passed without a two-thirds majority - as required by Eyman's initiative. Lawmakers contended they were merely extending an existing tax.

Here's the rub: Eyman's two-thirds rule - passed four separate times and possibly again this fall - may be unconstitutional. The state charter says "no bill shall become a law unless ... a majority of the members elected to each house be recorded thereon as voting in its favor."

Each time lawmakers challenged it, however, the Washington Supreme Court punted on procedural grounds. There will be none of that with R.Y.O. Because the company has

legal standing and no other options, it may have forced the Supreme Court to answer the question directly.

For Eyman, this is not good news. For anyone else who wants this question settled, it is.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Senate President Brent Hill, R-Rexburg. He showed Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood, the error of her ways.

Shortly before winning her May 15 primary challenge, Nuxoll used taxpayer dollars to distribute a blatantly political flier to people living not only in her old legislative District 8 - Clearwater, Idaho, Lewis and Valley counties - but also to those in her newly reconfigured District 7 - parts of Bonner as well as Shoshone, Clearwater and Idaho counties.

To boot, she distributed this material solely to Republican voters.

Idahoans give senators \$2,000 for constituent mailings, but expect them to use it for business, not politics.

"We just visited about it," Hill told the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell, "and I said I thought it would be best if she reimbursed for all of it. ... It was a mutual agreement. If I hadn't suggested it, she would have by the end of our conversation."

Nuxoll's campaign account reimbursed the Senate for \$890.09 on May 5. - M.T.