

Butting in

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Marty Trillhaase, Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. He has joined 11 Tea Party senators and 59 House members in urging the 50 state governors to oppose creating state-based health insurance exchanges as part of Obamacare.

That puts Labrador in league with Reps. Michele Bachmann, R-Minn, and Joe ("You lie!") Wilson, R-S.C.

Among those you won't see signing the letter are Labrador's fellow Idahoans - Rep. Mike Simpson and Sens. Jim Risch and Mike Crapo - nor Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash.

What about the 10th Amendment? Can you imagine a group headed by former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi telling Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter to support dam breaching in the name of protecting fish? How about a delegation of Democrats chaired by New York Sen. Chuck Schumer directing Otter how to respond to the Supreme Court's immigration ruling?

Otter, the people running the Department of Insurance and the Department of Health and Welfare as well as senior legislators know a good deal more about state policy than Labrador. That's why Idaho's delegation typically follows the lead of its governor, not the other way around.

And in this case, Labrador is offering truly awful advice. The longer Otter waits to pursue a state-based exchange, the more likely Idahoans, businesses, insurance companies and health care providers will labor under a more expensive federal program.

JEERS ... to Idaho Department of Correction Director Brent Reinke. After all the grief Idaho has suffered at the hands of Corrections Corp. of America, why would Reinke's department get even more deeply involved with that outfit?

Idaho just signed a contract to house 450 inmates at the Kit Carson Correctional Center at Burlington, Colo. CCA manages the Colorado prison.

Reinke's department said it had no choice. With Idaho's prison population growing, it is out of room. CCA submitted the better bid.

All of which rings hollow. The CCA-managed Idaho Correctional Center near Boise became known as the "gladiator school" where inmates assaulted each other and guards did little to stop it.

Only after the ACLU launched a class-action lawsuit on behalf of state prison inmates did CCA add more staff, investigate prisoner beatings, train its staff better and not throw vulnerable inmates to the wolves by mixing them in with predators.

Oh, and it took that lawsuit to get CCA to follow the terms of its contract with the state of Idaho.

Now Reinke proposes to send inmates to a CCA client in another state where if something goes wrong, you're less likely to hear about it.

Reinke's department should be getting out of bed with CCA, not snuggling closer.

JEERS ... to U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont. In any other year, his use of the transportation bill to define roll-your-own cigarette machines as cigarette manufactures would be welcomed.

Rather than paying a pittance of federal tax on loose tobacco, these companies will pay more than 10 times more in cigarette taxes.

In other words, it puts them out of business.

But this is not just any year. This is the year R.Y.O. Machine LLC, an Ohio corporation, went to court trying to block Washington from extending a full cigarette tax on its product.

R.Y.O.'s argument? The Senate failed to pass the roll your own cigarette tax by a two-thirds majority as required by Tim Eyman's initiative.

Opponents of Eyman's measure have sought to declare it unconstitutional because the state charter only 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."

But the Supreme Court has dodged making a ruling on technical grounds.

R.Y.O.'s lawsuit was the perfect case, putting the question of constitutionality before the court in a way it could not evade - as it has in the past.

Thanks to Baucus, R.Y.O. has been stubbed out.

Update: Last week, this page jeered Nez Perce County Commissioner - and former Lewiston Mayor - Doug Havens. He signed an initiative aimed at blocking the city from accumulating surpluses in its general and enterprise funds - and then loaning money to other programs. The most recent example involves loaning \$800,000 from the sanitation fund toward the new downtown library.

By voting for past city budgets without raising that issue, Havens acquiesced to the practice - only to now criticize it from the relative safety of his new public office.

In a Turnabout published Tuesday, Havens wrote: "While serving four years on the Lewiston City Council, I voted against the reading or adoption of three annual city budgets. I supported the 2009 budget because it included a \$500,000 rebate from the sanitation enterprise fund to the residential users."

The jeer said he voted for three city budgets.

Havens said he voted for one.

Actually, city council minutes show he voted for two:

- Aug. 28, 2006 - Havens was part of a 6-1 majority to adopt both a budget and the tax certification measure. He was part of a group that repeatedly sought to trim spending for such items as sidewalks, tourism and vehicles. Throughout protracted debates, nobody raised the question about building surpluses and transferring funds.
- Aug. 27, 2007 - Havens was among two opponents to the budget and the tax bill.
- Aug. 25, 2008 - Havens joined a six-member majority - with one councilor absent - adopting a budget and tax measure.
- Aug. 24, 2009 - Havens was among two budget opponents.

When asked to explain, Havens said he had voted against a preliminary reading of the budget ordinance on Aug. 28, 2006, before ultimately voting for its adoption.

Tell you what, Doug.

We're going to stand by the jeer. - M.T.