

Tell it to Judy

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Fourth District Court Judge Richard Greenwood. Former Nampa school superintendent Russell Joki and other patrons put a legitimate issue before him: How can a state with a constitutional pledge to provide "a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools" compel parents to pay hundreds of dollars in fees for labs, vocational-technical and humanities?

How is it not discrimination against families without the means to pay these fees? Are they expected to deny their children more costly classes? Or do they claim poverty to local school administrators, essentially groveling for what is their child's constitutional right?

At its core, the fee issue blows the lid off the Legislature's disinvestment in public education. To make up the difference, schools charge fees and seek local property tax levies.

Nor was Joki plowing new legal ground. After a Minidoka County family balked at paying a textbook fee, a unanimous Idaho Supreme Court ruled in 1970: "... The school and the entire product to be received from it by the student must be 'free.' "

Rather than hear the merits, Greenwood coyly told Joki to take his complaint to small claims court. In effect, the ruling strangles the lawsuit because it forces thousands of Idaho families to go to court.

Imagine that. Reducing a compelling constitutional question to an overdue credit card bill or rent payment.

What would Greenwood have done with *Brown vs. Board of Education* - the case that ended racial segregation in the public schools?

Route it to Judge Judy?

CHEERS ... to Co-Chairmen Alex Irby of Orofino, Dale Harris of Missoula and the Clearwater Basin Collaborative. For five years, this panel of disparate interests - conservationists, timber advocates, local politicians, tribal and motorized recreationists - have been navigating through the minefields that have paralyzed natural resource management in Idaho for more than a generation.

Prompted by Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, they worked through their competing agenda and found common ground:

- An anticipated 50 percent increase in timber cut from the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest.

- Counties get economic development and support for restoration of Secure Rural Schools dollars.
- Conservationists obtain about 300,000 acres of wilderness while seven streams are granted Wild and Scenic River protection.
- Outfitters and guides receive protection for camps and maintained trails.
- Motorized recreationists will have a north-south route from Elk City to Avery.

While only the jumping-off point, it's a local plan hammered out by local interests - rather than one imposed from the top down.

JEERS ... to Kootenai County Sheriff Ben Wolfinger. Peeved at the Boy Scouts of America national office's decision to admit openly gay boys, Wolfinger is ending his department's sponsorship of a Boy Scout troop.

Bad enough that a man in his position would practice open discrimination against boys. That's on Wolfinger's conscience.

But Wolfinger justifies his decision on Idaho's 1972 anti-sodomy law.

"It would be inappropriate for the sheriff's office to sponsor an organization that is promoting a lifestyle that is in violation of state law," he said.

It may be on the books, but it's not the law. Ten years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down an anti-sodo-

my law in Texas - and with it, the statute in Idaho and the 12 other holdouts. How can Kootenai County's top cop be so ignorant of the law?

What else doesn't he know?

CHEERS ... to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee. On May 20, he chided lawmakers for not passing an \$8.4 billion, 10-year package of transportation projects funded by a 10-cent fuel tax boost and other measures.

As reported by Washington State Wire's Erik Smith, Inslee had this to say:

"We have got to fix and maintain what we have today. Our valuable public assets, our roads, bridges, ferries and buses are deteriorating today because we are not investing sufficiently to keep them up to par. Today - one out of five bridges today are functionally obsolete in the state of Washington. We had a bridge just the other day over in Carbonado where we had to put restrictions - that you have to have weight restrictions going on. We have got a bridge over the Columbia River. Today, out of 100, it is ranked 18. Now, to put this in perspective, the bridge that fell down in Minnesota was ranked 50."

That Minnesota bridge was the I-35W Bridge in Minneapolis, which collapsed into the Mississippi River on Aug. 1, 2007, killing 13 and injuring 145.

Four days after Inslee spoke, a trucker hauling drilling equipment struck the steel frame of the I-5 bridge over the Skagit River, sending the span and two motorists into the river.

It didn't take long for Inslee to be proven right, did it?

CHEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. OK, when you hear the chief executive concede Fox News is his "primary portal for looking into the world," it's disconcerting. It's no better when people on the left look to the Rev. Al Sharpton and Chris Matthews over on MSNBC.

Give Otter credit for this much. Relying on an echo chamber for news reinforces gridlock and government dysfunction, he says. When he sought passage of a state-based health insurance exchange or defended the Common Core education standards, Otter incurred the wrath of the Fox News audience.

"But I have to deal with reality," Otter told the Idaho Statesman's editorial board. "I find it convenient sometimes to identify the problems philosophically, but I find it impossible to identify the solution totally philosophically."

Good idea, Governor. But what will the Tea Party have to say about it? - M.T.