

Dialing for dollars

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho. Look over the invitation his re-election campaign extended to heavy rollers. Risch wants them to join him in an "Idaho Hunting Excursion" Jan. 18 and 19 at Hagerman.

See the contact person listed?

It's John Sandy.

Risch's chief of staff.

The man he pays \$169,459 a year to work for you.

No law says Risch's top lieutenant can't work on the campaign after office hours. But all you have is his word that he's playing by the rules.

That's why most campaign and office staffs keep their distance. When they don't, the public is left to assume their tax dollars are subsidizing a political campaign.

For instance, Congressman Bill Sali, R-Idaho, drew fire six years ago because his government-paid press secretary, Wayne Hoffman, was doing double duty as a campaign spokesman. Sali's opponent, Democrat Walt Minnick, said that was inappropriate.

Two years later, Republicans were all too eager to point out that Minnick, now the incumbent, was relying on his government-paid adviser and spokesman, John Foster, to run the campaign.

Risch is no political novice. Why is he behaving like one?

JEERS ... to Tim Eyman. He's willing to blow up your school, university and health program just to settle a score.

Washington's Supreme Court struck down Eyman's signature initiative requiring any tax increase should require a two-thirds majority in the House and Senate.

Which leaves Eyman in the cold unless he can persuade two-thirds of the House and Senate to put his measure before the voters as a constitutional amendment.

Eyman can't sell the idea on the merits. So he has resorted to extortion.

His latest ballot measure would ask voters to cut the state sales tax by 1 cent - or about \$1 billion a year - unless the Legislature knuckles under and passes his amendment.

This is a game of chicken. Guess where you're standing.

CHEERS ... to Ken Edmunds. Idaho's new Department of Labor chief didn't mince words and he didn't muzzle his staff's message to the Legislature's economic outlook committee: Idaho's wages and per capita incomes are ranked ahead of only Mississippi and that state is gaining on us.

That reflects poorly on Edmunds' boss, Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. But Edmunds, a former Idaho State Board of Education member, didn't back off. The problem, he said, was an under-educated workforce.

"Practically every employer I talk to tells me the same thing," he said. "They say they're not finding the employees they need at any level. I can't think of a single employer who has told me that they're getting the workers they need."

JEERS ... to Gov. Otter. Joining legislative leaders such as Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill, R-Rexburg, and House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, the governor pledged to spend more of your money defending the dubious idea that same-sex marriage ought to be unconstitutional in Idaho.

Idaho's 2006 amendment is destined to be overturned. The trend in popular opinion, legal reasoning and politics is clear. Look no further than Utah, where a federal judge recently overturned that state's anti-gay marriage as blatantly discriminatory.

No one expects Otter - and Attorney General Lawrence Wasden - to abandon their official obligation to defend Idaho law in the courts. But the governor is quoted as saying he's willing to write a blank check, presumably to hire expensive expert witnesses to dispute evidence that clearly shows:

- Gays make good parents.
- Not all heterosexual marriages are formed to raise children.
- Marriage, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, is a stabilizing force.
- The definition of marriage over time has changed.
- Allowing gays to marry in no way diminishes traditional marriage.

Why not instead stipulate to those points? Limiting its case to the legal points would be far cheaper. Doing anything more is pure pandering.

CHEERS ... to David Johnson. Beginning in the 1970s at the *Idahonian* (now the *Moscow-Pullman Daily News*) and then continuing into this century at the *Lewiston Tribune*, Johnson did the seemingly impossible: He chronicled the non-controversial, natural, everyday world of ordinary people in a business that prizes conflicts, the dramatic and the strange.

People just going about their lives had a story. Johnson always found a way to tell it.

Dubbed the Charles Kuralt of Idaho - in honor of the broadcaster who took to the nation's back roads in pursuit of the real America - Johnson actually did Kuralt one better. He pitched the idea

of randomly picking his subjects through the telephone book to the CBS veteran. Kuralt's enthusiastic endorsement persuaded Johnson's bosses to go along with his proposal and "Everyone Has a Story" became a Friday morning staple for three decades.

Johnson closed the book on that column and retired last week. Hard to imagine Fridays without him.

CHEERS ... to Bob Cooper. Attorney General Lawrence Wasden's veteran spokesman is one of the best in the business. Straightforward. Knowledgeable. Candid. And generous with the time he was willing to lend toward guiding reporters through the nooks and crannies of Idaho law - especially when it pertained to the state's open meetings and public records statutes.

By the time Cooper retired last week, he'd spent nearly 17 years with the attorney general's office. He knew the law as well as many lawyers.

Before that, he had worked at the state lottery, employment and Health and Welfare. But with Cooper, who spent 12 years in local broadcast news during its glory days of the 1970s and 1980s, you always knew you were dealing with a guy who saw himself as a professional journalist and a public servant. - M.T.