

Clueless in Boise

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. If you entertained any doubts Idaho's millionaire chief executive floats through life in a mink-lined bubble, consider his comments to the Idaho Press Club Tuesday.

Idaho's emerging anti-gay reputation, he said, isn't hurting the state.

"I can't point to one company that I've visited with that said, 'If you don't do this' or even suggested that was a problem," Otter said.

Business doesn't mind if Idaho's sclerotic GOP-controlled Legislature hasn't got time to even consider extending the same civil rights protections to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people state law now affords to everyone else. They don't care if that same bunch of callous politicians is receptive to expanding the legal protections of those who would discriminate against the LGBT community - even in the seven Idaho cities that have passed their own human rights ordinances.

All they want are tax breaks.

Who is Otter talking to?

Not the major institutions and businesses - including those in Idaho -that already adopted anti-discrimination policies in the workplace. They're trying to recruit the best and brightest employees - not chase them away to other states.

Not his predecessors. Former Gov. Phil Batt called on Idaho to add the words "sexual orientation and gender identity" to the human rights act he shepherded almost a half-century ago.

Certainly not any gays. When the Williams Institute at UCLA surveyed 2,000 LGBT Idahoans a decade ago, it found more than half felt compelled to conceal their sexual orientation or gender identity at work. Almost a quarter of them had been fired, paid less or denied promotions.

Asked what he'd say to gays and lesbians who are considering relocating to the Gem State, Otter said, "Good luck and best wishes."

Translation: "Have a nice day. Just have it somewhere else."

CHEERS ... to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee. He's the third governor - behind Oregon's John Kitzhaber and Colorado's John Hickenlooper - to declare a moratorium on capital punishment.

Inslee is using his power to grant a reprieve to any of Washington's nine death row inmates. So the hiatus lasts as long as Inslee's tenure in office.

"I don't question their guilt or the gravity of their crimes," Inslee said. "They get no mercy from me. This action today does not commute their sentences or issue any pardon to the offender. But I do not believe their horrific offenses override the problems in our criminal justice system."

Because Inslee is not dealing with an imminent execution, his decision puts the focus not on the criminal or his victim but on these questions:

- Error -New evidence has freed more than 130 condemned people across the U.S. Among them, according to the Death Penalty Information Center, was Benjamin Harris, who spent a dozen years on Washington's death row before his conviction was overturned in 1997.
- Cost - The Urban Institute found the trials, the appeals, the extra security and the cost of staffing death row run \$3 million per case - three times what it does to lock up a convicted murderer for 40 years
- Arbitrary -If the death penalty is reserved for the worst of the worst, why was Gary Leon Ridgway, the Green River Killer, allowed to parlay knowledge about his murder victims into a life sentence?
- Trend - Eighteen states, including six since 2007, have abolished capital punishment. Should Washington become the 19th state to take that step? At least now, it has the opportunity to contemplate the question.

JEERS ... to state Rep. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins. Three years after the concept of nullification was thoroughly discredited in the state Capitol, Shepherd is doubling down. That earlier effort merely sought to openly defy a duly passed federal statute, Obamacare. Shepherd would nullify the Environmental Protection Agency and everything it does within the Gem State.

If a state can nullify one branch of the federal government, what's next?

Don't want to pay taxes? Nullify the Internal Revenue Service.

Unhappy with the Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management? Nullify them and grab the land.

And when the U.S. Army steps in to quash this insurrection? Nullify the Department of Defense, too.

JEERS ... to Sen. Curt McKenzie, R-Nampa. Wednesday, the chairman of the Senate State Affairs Committee allotted National Rifle Association lobbyist Dakota Moore 40 minutes to filibuster in favor of McKenzie's bill to permit beer-soaked college students to roam campus while carrying concealed guns.

But McKenzie later closed debate and approved the bill, shutting out Boise Police Chief Mike Masterson.

Masterson wanted to say:

- Virtually every Idaho police chief opposes this bill.
- McKenzie's bill allows students 21 and older to carry a concealed weapon after a mere eight hours of training. That's not even close to sufficient. Cops constantly hone their skills to compensate for how "our bodies undermine our decisions to use force."
- More guns means more potential for more injuries and more confrontations with cops.

CHEERS ... to U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash. Monday, Cantwell and Rep. Tom Cole, R-Okla., put National Football League Commissioner Roger Goodell on notice: Rename the Washington Redskins or risk the NFL's tax exempt status.

Cantwell - chairwoman of the Senate Indian Affairs Committee - and Cole - a member of the Chickasaw nation - said the NFL "is on the wrong side of history." Cantwell told the New York Times she would "definitely" target the league's tax-exempt status as leverage.

"You're getting a tax break for educational purposes, but you're still embracing a name that people see as a slur and encouraging it," she said. - M.T.