

# Breaking bad news

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to the Idaho Fish and Game Department. When it comes to killing wolves, Fish and Game apparently believes the less you know, the better.

Working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services, it exterminated 23 wolves in the Lolo Zone - which covers parts of the Lochsa and North Fork of the Clearwater River basins. As Fish and Game's Clearwater regional Supervisor Dave Cadwallader told the Tribune's Eric Barker, his agency believes wolf predation is behind declining elk populations in the region. Others believe habitat is the reason.

What's troubling here, however, is the shady way Fish and Game went about this.

First the agency carried out the hunts on Feb. 25, 26 and 27. It waited until Feb. 28 - a Friday - to say anything about it.

You want to bury bad news? Release it on a Friday.

"Because of safety concerns, the department thought it was best to carry out the action and then notify the public about it," Fish and Game spokesman Mike Keckler said.

Fine.

What does Fish and Game have to fear from the Nez Perce Tribe and the Clearwater-Nez Perce National Forest? One is a wolf co-manager. The other is the federal land manager. They're entitled to a heads-up. Not this time.

Aaron Miles, director of the Nez Perce Tribal Natural Resources Committee, didn't know anything about the wolf kills until Barker told him about it.

"It took me by surprise," Miles said. "It's bold and it's arrogant."

However expedient in the short term, stealth breeds distrust. One day, Fish and Game will regret taking this step.

CHEERS ... to Don Burnett. The former University of Idaho law school dean just wrapped up his tenure as interim president, an assignment he accepted when Duane Nellis departed to become the leader of Texas Tech University last year.

His permanent successor, Chuck Staben, came on board this month.

When Burnett arrived, the institution had been shaken by the departure of yet another president. Almost instantaneously, he calmed the waters and restored a sense of confidence.

That reflects Burnett's impeccable credentials - dean of two law schools, a prominent eastern Idaho lawyer and charter member of the state Court of Appeals. He hit the ground running. He knew the players. He had the political gravitas. He built alliances. Throughout his tenure, Idaho's higher education community seemed to function more smoothly.

But the rest was pure Burnett.

Knowledgeable. Articulate. Candid. Dedicated. And an infectious enthusiasm for the UI that nobody - politicians, ordinary Idahoans, students and faculty - could resist.

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. On the moral issue of our day - extending Idaho's anti-discrimination ban to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people - Otter's performance has been abysmal.

This week, protesters barricaded the doors to Otter's offices on the second floor of the state Capitol - the latest episode in a campaign of civil disobedience prompted by the Legislature's refusal to even hold a public hearing and consider adding the words "sexual orientation and gender identity" to Idaho's human rights act.

Otter's reaction: "I always understand the frustration. But that's not the question here now. The question here now is: Are they starting to hurt their own cause?"

How is that even possible?

If it's about guns on campus, protecting agriculture from spying eyes or even sanctioning religious-based prejudice, lawmakers have all the time in the world. But adding the words has been shelved not once, not twice, but eight years in a row.

Otter followed that up by suggesting protesters take their case to the legislative chambers on the Capitol's third floor.

"I can't do anything. I can't do anything down here," he said.

Since when is the state's chief executive an innocent bystander? Otter wants this job for another four years. What's the point of being governor if you won't lead?

JEERS ... to House Republicans who backed GOP floor leader Mike Moyle's plan to slice another \$126 million from Idaho income taxes. Moyle's scheme cleared the House on a 55-13 margin.

If it becomes law, it will further undermine Idaho's ability to recoup the damage years of tax cuts and recession have inflicted on public school and higher education budgets.

Why would anyone whose district includes the University of Idaho vote to do that? Yet, Rep. Cindy Agidius, R-Moscow, went along.

Why would anyone who represents Lewis-Clark State College, follow in her path? Yet, Rep. Thyra Stevenson, R-Lewiston, did just that.

Reps. Shannon McMillan, R-Silverton, and Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins, don't have a university in their backyards. But their constituents might want to ask why they voted for a rich person's tax break. Moyle's plan would save someone making \$30,000 all of \$13 a year. But the individual making \$300,000 would save \$1,633.

CHEERS ... to Senate Education Committee Chairman John Goedde, R-Coeur d'Alene. He wants to pull the plug on state school Superintendent Tom Luna's sweetheart deal with a corporate crony.

Last summer, Luna took a one-year, \$2.25 million appropriation and transformed it into a 15-year, \$33.75 million contract for Education Networks of America. The Nashville, Tenn.-based company would provide Wi-Fi in the high schools.

ENA contributed \$6,000 to Luna's campaigns and its Idaho director, Gary Lough, once worked for the superintendent.

Goedde wants to tear up the contract and allocate Wi-Fi money directly to the schools. Large districts have the resources to establish their own networks. Any money they save is theirs to spend on other technology. Smaller schools may stick with ENA or find another contractor willing to do the work for less money.

That's showing good faith in the ability of local educators to run their affairs. Moreover, Goedde is telegraphing the right message to Luna and his successors about how not to do business in the future. Good for him. - M.T.