

Heartless

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to U.S. Sens. Jim Risch and Mike Crapo, both R-Idaho. Monday, Risch and Crapo joined another 36 Republicans in voting against extending unemployment benefits to people who, through no fault of their own, can't find work.

Supported by 59 members of the Senate, including Washington Democrats Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray, the measure would provide help for up to 99 weeks. State benefits end at 26 weeks.

It now heads to the House.

Why would Risch and Crapo vote no?

Not because it encourages goldbricking. Idaho's average unemployment check comes to \$6.25 an hour - less than minimum wage. More than 39,000 Idahoans are working at part-time jobs because that's all they can get. One of every four jobs in the Gem State is part time.

Idaho is second only to Tennessee in the share of its people working at minimum wage. It's second only to Mississippi in how little its people earn.

And it's not because Idahoans don't need this help. As the year ended - and the federal unemployment benefits expired - more than 2,300 Idahoans lost their lifelines.

For Risch and Crapo to vote this way can mean only one thing: They don't care.

JEERS ... to U.S. Reps. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., Raul Labrador and Mike Simpson, both R-Idaho. They were among 222 members of Congress who last month voted to undermine the Antiquities Act of 1906.

With this tool, presidents from Teddy Roosevelt to George W. Bush have preserved the best of America - such as the Grand Canyon, Grand Teton National Park and Idaho's Craters of the Moon.

Ultimately, it may prove the salvation of Idaho's Boulder-White Clouds mountain range. Despite Simpson's commendable effort to rally an Idaho coalition around an Idaho plan to carve out a wilderness area, he's been stymied by members of his own party - most notably Sen. Risch, who had a John Kerry moment when he withdrew his support.

McMorris Rodgers, Labrador and Simpson signed on to a plan requiring any proposed monument of more than 5,000 acres to undergo a full environmental impact review - a vote oozing with hypocrisy. As the Idaho Statesman's Rocky Barker observed, these are the same

people who gripe about federal red tape when it comes to projects they support, such as timber sales and grazing allotments.

CHEERS ... to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee. Last week, he vetoed a popular but flawed bill to regulate how state and local governments utilize drones. Chief among its defects was how it undermined public disclosure. Much of what the drones did would be declared private - and the evidence would be quickly destroyed.

"This would bar the public from essentially any information that in any way could be considered identifiable to any individual," Inslee said. "That's a major, major carve-out in our public disclosure rules."

Washington has time to get this job done right. Inslee wisely declared a 15-month moratorium forbidding state agencies under his authority from purchasing or operating unmanned aircraft. Meanwhile, he's pulling together a task force of state and local officials, cops, prosecutors, civil liberties groups and the media to hash out a balanced remedy for the 2015 Legislature to consider.

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. Does Idaho's millionaire chief executive know how he sounds? Consider this passage from his latest fundraising letter:

"In November, we're going to be facing a big-moneyed, liberal Democrat, who has promised to put his own money into the campaign. And already, an incredible 82 percent of his campaign has been raised by writing himself a check!"

He's talking about A.J. Balukoff, a Boise businessman and millionaire whose Democratic candidacy is standing in the way of Otter's third term.

"He seems to think he can 'buy and spend his way to victory,' But we can beat him the same way we've won every election here in Idaho: With Republican, grassroots support from every part of our state."

Grassroots? Really?

Remember when then-Congressman Otter's 2004 re-election campaign was barely completed before he announced his bid for the 2006 gubernatorial race - effectively gobbling up all the national and state special-interest dollars and thereby barricading his candidacy against any potential GOP contender?

Comb through his 2010 financial disclosure reports. There's \$9,000 from Corrections Corporation of America - the scandal-plagued contractor who transformed the Idaho Correctional Center into a "gladiator school." There's also \$5,000 from K-12 and \$3,000 from Education Networks of America - members of the for-profit private education industry that stood to gain from the education overhaul package Otter and state schools superintendent Tom Luna pushed through the 2011 Legislature.

And in the current campaign, Otter pocketed \$60,000 from Nevada casino operators Steve Wynn, Wynn's wife Andrea, Frank Fertitta III and Lorenzo Fertitta, Wynn Resorts and Station Casinos.

Doesn't that sound a bit like "buying and spending his way to victory"?

CHEERS ... to Bruce Pitman. After 41 years as University of Idaho Greek advisor, dean of students and vice provost for Student Affairs, Pittman announced his retirement last week.

Only a straight shooter like Pitman could handle some of the UI's more difficult problems - such as responding to the murder of graduate student Katy Benoit by UI professor Ernesto Bustamante or rallying the campus community around alcohol and student safety reforms.

Pitman told the Tribune's Elizabeth Rudd he plans to stay on the job long enough to enable the UI to hire a permanent successor.

Good for him. That means a minimal amount of disruption in his office.

Good for everyone else, too. It means he'll be around a few months longer. - M.T.