

More ground lost

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to the Idaho State Board of Education. If you want to know why college is being priced out of reach for moderate- and middle-income Idaho families, just observe what took place in Moscow this week.

Even though legislators boosted higher education budgets by 6.2 percent, administrators sought more tuition - 2 percent from Lewis-Clark State College President Tony Fernandez, 4.7 percent from University of Idaho President Chuck Staben.

Of course, this is taking place in a state where incomes are ranked next to dead last.

"Students are seriously considering not going to college because it is too expensive. Yes, financial aid is available - it is in the terms of debt," said State Board member Rod Lewis of Boise. "Until we have the fortitude to keep pushing for more state help, it is on the backs of students. We need to figure out how we can become more cost efficient and reduce costs so we don't have to put it on the students."

Lewis and State Board President Don Soltman of Twin Lakes were outvoted. So the state board did what it always does. It shaved a few dollars off the UI's request and called it good.

Then the board gave itself a pat on the back for, in the words of its news release, approving "tuition and fees ... at levels lower than requested and at the lowest level in recent years."

Students now pay 47 percent of the cost of their instruction, up from 14 percent just 20 years ago. In Idaho, the average student is in hock more than \$24,000. And enrollments are faltering.

Nobody stopped this cycle of ratcheting up tuition a few percentage points here, a few more dollars there. Lawmakers neglected higher education. Administrators cared more about budgets than student access. State board members split the difference.

But, please, spare us the self-congratulations.

CHEERS ... to state Sen. Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston. Alone among north central Idaho Republicans seeking election to the state Legislature, he has stood up to the GOP's loyalty oath.

Republican apparatchiks insist that candidates swear fealty to the party platform, even with these warts:

- Eliminating your right to elect your own U.S. senator, handing that power back to state legislators.
- Throwing the economy into chaos by eliminating the Federal Reserve.

- Empowering self-serving politicians to gerrymander their legislative and congressional districts.
- Closing the GOP primary to anyone who is not a card-carrying Republican .
- Violating Idaho's Constitution by allowing tax dollars to flow to private and religious schools through tax credits.

Among those who endorsed every wacky idea in that document were Rep. Thyra Stevenson, R-Lewiston, Sen.

Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood, Rep. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggin, Rep. Shannon McMillan, R-Silverton, and her primary election opponent, Shauna Hillman of Wallace, as well as John Carlson of Moscow, who is challenging Sen. Dan Schmidt, D-Moscow, and Caroline Nilsson Troy of Genesee, who is seeking the House seat being vacated by Rep. Shirley Ringo, D-Moscow.

Rep. Cindy Agidius, R-Moscow, has yet to respond.

"When I chose to run for office, my ideals most nearly matched those of the Republican Party and that is why I chose to run as a Republican," Johnson wrote the GOP. "However, I took an oath, as an Idaho state senator, to serve the people of Idaho. I take that responsibility very seriously and I take every vote in that same vein. Each time I am called upon to make a decision, I consider my own values, the ideals of the Republican Party, the opinions of the people of Lewis and Nez Perce counties and, ultimately, the Idaho Constitution."

JEERS ... to former House Speaker Lawrence (Boss) Denney, R-Midvale. The most ethically challenged Idaho politician of our time has the temerity to cast aspersions on the man he wants to succeed as secretary of state: Ben Ysursa.

Among four Republicans seeking the job, Denney's peeved that the incumbent lent his support to chief deputy Ada County Clerk Phil McGrane.

Foul, cried Denney. As the state's chief elections officer, Ysursa should stay neutral.

He'd never do such a thing, Denney said. Oh, please. Ysursa broke no precedent. His immediate predecessor, Pete T. Cenarrusa, endorsed Ysursa in 2002.

Leave it to Denney to heap hypocrisy to the steaming mound of political misdeeds that constitute his sorry record.

JEERS ... to Peter Goldmark, Washington's Department of Natural Resources public lands commissioner. In 2008, he portrayed Republican incumbent Doug Sutherland as a tool of the timber companies and issued this pledge: "I will not accept money from the industries that I'll be regulating."

The Seattle Times reports timber and wood products companies have forked over about \$100,000 to Goldmark in the last three years. That's about a fifth of Goldmark's total campaign

treasury and some of it comes from the same company he cast as a villain in his first campaign, Weyerhaeuser.

CHEERS ... to Monica Hopkins. Executive director of Idaho's American Civil Liberties Union office since 2008, Hopkins is off to serve the same role for the ACLU's branch in Washington, D.C.

Under Hopkins, the ACLU took the lead in exposing how Corrections Corporations of America's mismanagement exacerbated inmate violence at the Idaho Correctional Center near Boise. It helped stitch together a quilt of justice as seven Idaho cities, including Moscow, passed ordinances protecting the civil rights of gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people. The organization blocked attempts to cloak discrimination in the name of religious freedom. It helped restore Medicaid coverage for the developmentally disabled. And it joined in the first reform of Idaho's criminal justice system in a generation.

If she got that much done swimming upstream in Idaho's conservative political culture, who knows what she'll pull off in Washington, D.C.? - M.T.