

# Not for sale

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to Idaho House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley. It's one thing for Bedke to give lip service to the notion of Idaho acquiring control of federal lands within its borders. But lending his imprimatur to Utah state Rep. Ken Ivory's Summit on the Transfer of Public Lands at Salt Lake City is something else.

"It's time the states in the West come of age," Bedke told a Utah Capitol audience. "We're every bit as capable of managing the lands in our boundaries as the states east of Colorado."

How has he missed this steady drumbeat of facts:

- Deputy Attorney General Steve Strack told the Legislature's public lands task force it's folly to expect the courts to hand over federal holdings to the states.
- The federal government's treaties with Idaho's Indian tribes would be a huge obstacle to any transfer.
- Business and timber groups aren't thrilled with excessive regulations and antiquated environmental laws, but they view this as a non-starter.
- At U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson's request, the Congressional Research Service found Idaho would need at least \$392 million and closer to \$500 million a year simply to manage assets now owned by the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. At what point would Idaho be forced to sell off the lands to the highest bidder?

All of which may explain why every time an Idaho politician gets too close to this idea, he gets singed.

As will Bedke.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. When it comes to your access to public records, Idaho starts off on the right path - the records belong to you. But over the years, lawmakers have given government officials more cause to refuse to hand them over.

If you don't like it, you have to sue your government.

At the urging of the Newspaper Association of Idaho, Otter created a public records ombudsman. If an agency denies access to records, that office will take a look, possibly resolving the matter before someone has to shell out money for a lawyer.

It's only an executive order, not a state law.

It only applies to state agencies that answer to Otter, not local officials.

Nonetheless, it's a step toward making state government more accountable.

CHEERS ... to state Rep. Shirley Ringo, D-Moscow. Once again, she's in the basement of the Idaho Freedom Foundation's index of more than 170 votes. IFF gave her a negative 74 - six spaces from the bottom. By comparison, Rep. John Rusche, D-Lewiston, came in with a negative 70, Sen. Dan Schmidt, D-Moscow, scored a negative 66 and Sen. Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston, was ranked a negative 39. Rep. Cindy Agidius, R-Moscow, broke into positive territory with score of 2.

IFF's voting index is nowhere near as stilted as it was a year ago, when a single issue - Otter's state-based health insurance exchange - decided whether someone was a hero or a goat.

Still, it usually divides problem-solvers in Boise from the rigid ideologues. For instance, budget committee Co-Chairman Dean Cameron, R-Rupert, and Majority Leader Bart Davis, R-Idaho Falls, racked up numbers that would have you believe they belong in the Democratic caucus.

JEERS ... to Rep. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins. His IFF index score was 122, fifth from the top. That's put him in league with people such as Rep. Ron Mendive, R-Coeur d'Alene. Mendive, who equated abortion with prostitution, got a score of 154 on the IFF index. Nullification guru Rep. Vito Barbieri, R-Dalton Gardens, was rated at 140.

And why not? Shepherd sponsored a bill to throw the Environmental Protection Agency out of Idaho. What's next? Outlawing gravity?

Within the region, Shepherd's fellow travelers included Rep. Shannon McMillan, R-Silverton (IFF score 152), Rep. Thyra Stevenson, R-Lewiston (IFF score 82), and Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood (IFF score 72).

JEERS ... to House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star. The next time you have to shell out more property taxes to support your schools, pay higher tuition to get into college or accept Idaho's persistent slide toward Mississippi's income rankings, think of Moyle.

Working with a business lobby called the Idaho Technology Council, Moyle convinced lawmakers to take sales tax off computer software purchased over the Internet or through the practice of "load and leave" in which vendors install programs but take their discs with them.

For 30 years, the sales tax applied. The reversal came late. In fact, the Senate passed this bill hours before it adjourned for the year.

Moyle persuaded lawmakers to take the word of a special interest - whose members include the J.R. Simplot Co., Melaleuca and Zions Bank - who claimed the impact would be minor.

The State Tax Commission warned the new exemption would pull \$5 million out of the state treasury and quickly escalate to \$40 million a year.

How is Idaho supposed to restore school cuts - let alone implement Otter's education task force recommendations - when Moyle continues to hand out tax goodies to big business?

CHEERS ... to Shauna Hillman. The Smelterville Republican, who is challenging Rep. McMillan in the May 20 primary, withdrew her blanket endorsement of the Idaho GOP's platform.

Signing that loyalty oath binds Republicans to such odd ideas as repealing the 17th Amendment, thereby taking away your vote for the U.S. Senate, and returning the U.S. to the gold standard.

"I apologize for not giving some of the questions posed more consideration," Hillman told the GOP. "I work for a living and I will try not to make this neophyte's mistake again."

Good for her. - M.T.