

Send in the clowns

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. Wednesday's statewide televised gubernatorial debate featured two clowns - and we're not talking about Otter and his GOP rival, Sen. Russ Fulcher, R-Meridian.

No, we're talking about real clowns.

Such as Harley Brown, a perennial Boise nuisance who claims to be a civil engineer, a former Navy Seabee and a cab driver. The Idaho Statesman's Dan Popkey has written that Brown's "sense of humor is more fit for a brothel than a Republican primary. His website includes a tab for 'Harleyisms,' a sour soup of racism, sexism and poor taste that makes it clear he has no intention of running a serious campaign." Public TV put the program on a 30-second delay to guard against any "Harleyisms."

Such as Walt Bayes, another perennial candidate who uses Idaho's elections to promote his extreme anti-abortion rights views.

Brown and Bayes are running for governor because Idaho's liberal ballot laws enabled them. To avoid the harder work of rounding up signatures to seek public office, state lawmakers allowed anyone with a checkbook to run.

Most likely, Brown and Bayes would have joined the rest of us in the television audience Wednesday. Idaho Public Television demands some sign that the candidate is serious:

- That he has produced and distributed campaign brochures, pamphlets or other literature.
- That he has some kind of a campaign structure - a manager and staffers. Three names, along with phone numbers and addresses, will do it.
- Proof that at least twice in the campaign year, he has made public appearances - in locations at least 200 miles apart.

But Otter insisted. Either allow Bayes and Brown on the stage, the governor's extortion message read, or he would not appear with Fulcher in even this lone debate.

A few viewers may have heard Bayes thank Otter for "making it possible for me to be here tonight."

Otherwise, they thought this is what passes for civic discourse in Idaho. Consider what Mother Jones had to say:

"Brown - who wore his customary leather vest and leather hat, has the presidential seal tattooed on his shoulder, two cigars in his right breast pocket, and is missing several prominent teeth -

used his closing argument to wave a signed certificate from a 'Masai prophet' that confirmed that he would one day be president of the United States. ...

"Bayes, who has a beard that extends halfway down his rib cage and resembles a 19th-century gold prospector, also wanted to talk about biblical prophecy, but mostly just abortion. His credentials for governor are that he once went to jail for home schooling his 16 children, five of whom went on to become rodeo cowboys. ... "

Don't be surprised if this becomes fodder for Jon Stewart, Comedy Central, "Saturday Night Live" and, possibly, "South Park."

But that's not Otter's concern. He just wanted to eat up valuable minutes that otherwise would have been spent dissecting his mediocre job performance during the past eight years.

That doesn't do you much good. But when "gettin' me re-elected" is the most important thing to Otter, who cares?

JEERS ... to Idaho Lt. Gov. Brad Little. This week, a federal judge struck down Idaho's ban on same-sex marriage as a violation of every American's constitutional rights.

That should come as no surprise to Little. Before this amendment to the Idaho Constitution got on the 2006 ballot, it had to secure a two-thirds vote in the House and the Senate.

The House was never a problem.

But in the Senate, enough level-headed Republicans - among them Lewiston's Joe Stegner - could not stomach the idea of etching prejudice into their constitution.

In 2005, the idea fell three votes short. Then a member of the state Senate, Little voted no.

The next year, however, was an election year and the pressure began to build.

When the vote came - Little, joined by Sen. John Goedde, R-Coeur d'Alene and former Sen. John Andreason, R-Boise - flipped, giving the measure a 26-10 margin

For Little, it worked out.

He's poised for bigger things.

JEERS ... to Nez Perce County Prosecutor Dan Spickler. Having lost a legal round to close down two of the Lewiston Urban Renewal Agency's three districts, Spickler now wants a District Court judge to decide whether the county - and every other taxing district within the URA - can spend the rebates approved last year.

The county is free to do what it likes with its \$233,222 rebate. But filing suit puts a cloud over the city of Lewiston's plans to spend \$468,904 - as well as the \$44,124 headed to the Lewiston School District and \$8,146 to the Port of Lewiston.

Whatever else you want to call his plan, it is not - as Spickler claims - the action of a friend. It does, however, carry the aroma of sour grapes.

CHEERS ... to the cadre of people who enlighten, enliven and energize this newspaper - those who faithfully air their views on the Tribune's Opinion page.

During the weekend, you met a few of them:

- Cheerful conservative Howard Miller.
- Religious contrarian Ralph Nielsen.
- Sincere curmudgeon Rick Rogers.
- Rogers' left-leaning foil, Brian Kolstad.
- Self-described radical Flora Teachman.
- Antagonist extraordinaire James Foley.

Thanks to one and all.

JEERS ... to Asotin County Fire District No. 1 commissioners. Patrons who attended Tuesday's forum confronted a frustrating lack of detail about a proposed conversion of a Clarkston Heights church into a fire station.

Nearly a month ago, the commissioners unanimously approved the findings of a draft study that looked into the project's feasibility.

Wouldn't that study yield at least some information? Why this apparent reticence? - M.T.