

Wink, wink

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho County Sheriff Doug Giddings. Sworn to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States as well as the Idaho Constitution and the laws, Giddings is winking and nodding with a group of lawbreakers - suction dredge miners who by operating on the Salmon River are violating the Clear Water Act, the Endangered Species Act and the rulings of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

So organizers (www.meetup.com/ronpaul-62/events/184508212) are advertising their activity as "100 percent protected. ... What better way to celebrate our Independence Day than to express our freedoms to mine without asking permission and not getting in trouble for it? Idaho County sheriff is 100 percent behind this."

Nor is it the first time Idaho County's sheriff has chosen to ignore his professional obligations for political advantage. Four years ago, he announced a ".308 SSS Wolf Pack raffle."

Translation: "Shoot, shovel and shut up" as in killing what were then federally protected wolves.

Last year, he lined up with a group of Oregon sheriffs who threatened to ignore any federal gun laws they concluded to be unconstitutional.

Would Giddings take such a laissez-faire attitude if two or three dozen marijuana advocates began openly smoking pot in Riggins?

How would he respond to a Rainbow Family of Living Light gathering in Grangeville?

And how would Giddings handle someone's assertion that he can drive along U.S. Highway 95 without a license, car registration or liability insurance?

Perhaps the next time Giddings takes his oath to protect and defend the Constitution, he should insert his own language.

CHEERS ... to Your Health Idaho board Chairman Stephen Weeg and Executive Director Amy Dowd.

When Idaho finally launched its own health insurance exchange, it was behind the curve. Republican opposition to Obamacare meant the state got a late start and had to rely on the federal software - healthcare.gov - for the first year. So when the federal rollout faltered, that put Idaho's enrollment another two months behind.

Almost a year later, Your Health Idaho has some of the best scores in the country.

As the New York Times reported last week, 37.3 percent of the people eligible to obtain insurance through Idaho's exchange used it. Only three states - Florida, Rhode Island and California - did better.

More than 76,000 Idahoans signed up - nearly double the 40,000 Idaho exchange managers anticipated. About 92 percent of them qualified for some kind of subsidy.

Not only does that tell you a great deal about the need for health insurance among Idaho's working poor, it also reflects smart decision-making. Rather than reinventing the wheel, Your Health Idaho relied upon the existing network of insurance brokers and agents.

JEERS ... to embattled Idaho Republican Party Chairman Barry Peterson. He's hanging on to the job despite a steady stream of legal opinions - his own attorney Christ Troupis is the one exception - that have told him to go.

Peterson called for a central committee meeting Aug. 9.

His opponents want to meet a week earlier.

So Peterson asked Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter to get involved.

"I believe that one phone call from Gov. Otter is all it would take to end the current division," Peterson said.

But Peterson didn't pick up the phone or move through informal back channels.

Instead, Peterson issued a press release.

That's the oldest trick in the book.

JEERS ... to Otter. He countered Peterson's insincerity with his own disingenuity.

"Well, I've gotta get a hold of Barry and find out to whom I have to make that call," Otter told the Spokesman Review's Betsy Russell.

Otter is a seasoned politician and the titular head of his party. How does he not know the number already - or at least have a staff member who can look it up?

Besides, Otter's claim that he promised to stay out of the GOP leadership race is hard to swallow, considering that the governor's fingerprints were all over eastern Idaho businessman Doug Sayer's bid to replace Peterson at the GOP convention.

This gubernatorial intervention comes three weeks after the Moscow convention succumbed to infighting and dysfunction. Which wouldn't be so bad except Otter seems to be no more engaged in the management of the state than he has with leading his party.

JEERS ... to U.S. Sen. Mike Lee, R-Utah. Want to know what Sen. Ted Cruz's "mini-me" thinks about women, sex and contraception? Catch Lee's performance on Sirius XM's "The Wilkow Majority."

Host Andrew Wilkow cued up the discussion on the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling enabling corporations to deny health insurance coverage for contraceptives on religious grounds as "whether or not a person who runs a business should be forced to provide something that is largely for recreational behavior, if it goes against their religious beliefs."

To which Lee responded: "Yeah, that's right. That's right."

Does Lee think women should remain celibate - except during the few years they spend trying to get pregnant?

And is he saying recreational sex is a bad idea - or just a bad idea for women?

CHEERS ... to state Rep. Steve Hartgen, R-Twin Falls. As the Twin Falls Times-News notes, Hartgen says it's long since time Idaho demand "claw-back" provisions before it hands out tax incentives to expanding businesses.

Hartgen's talking about the Idaho Workforce Development Training Fund. Since 1996, the state had doled out \$45 million. But if a company takes the money, trains the workers and then does not follow through, what happens?

Nothing. The money is gone. Case in point: Chobani's yogurt plant in Twin Falls recently laid off 42 employees - after state taxpayers paid to train those workers.

Under such circumstances, it's only reasonable for the state to demand its money back.

At least, that's what Hartgen plans to submit to the 2015 Legislature. - M.T.