

# Why wait?

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to Idaho state schools Superintendent Tom Luna. For the next four months, he'll have two masters:

- The voters who elected him, twice.
- The enigmatic Indianapolis-based Project Lead The Way that hired him this week, effective when Luna's term ends in January.

Project Lead The Way is a nonprofit that provides STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) curricula to high schools. In 2012, it reported \$12.3 million in revenues. Fees range from \$750 to \$3,000 per school - and PLTW is operating in Boise, Nampa, West Ada, Kuna, Caldwell and Fremont school districts.

Nobody will tell what PLTW is paying Luna to be its vice president of policy, advocacy and research - or what qualifies someone with an online degree in weights and measures for a job steeped in STEM.

Here are some other things you don't know:

- Who else among the multitude of private purveyors of education programs and technology in Luna's political orbit was bending his ear on the state's time?
- Whose agenda - yours or PLTW's - is he serving?

Avoiding this apparent conflict of interest would have been simple. Luna told Idaho Education News' Kevin Richert PLTW wanted him to jump ship sooner.

"I wasn't going to leave early," Luna told Richert. "Quite frankly, it could have been a deal breaker."

Wait a minute. Imagine you have an employee who has been job searching among your associates or even competitors. You don't know how long he's been doing it and with whom - or when.

But you do know he intends to stay on your payroll for another four months while he gets ready to work for someone else.

Would you trust him to give you 100 percent?

Why wait, Tom?

You're not indispensable. Someone can take your place.

PLTW wants you.

We don't.

JEERS ... to the Idaho State Board of Education. When it launched its so-called program prioritization, it gave Idaho's institutions of higher learning two assurances:

- As schools reviewed which of their programs worked well and which did not, the state board would keep hands off. The self-evaluation would be "bottom-up" rather than "top-down," state board member Bill Goesling of Moscow said.
- This was not about culling programs and cutting budgets. "I don't believe this (program prioritization process) was ever done as a cost-saving exercise," said state board member Richard Westerberg, who is chairman of the Instruction, Research and Student Affairs committee overseeing the effort.

As such, you would expect results resembling a Bell curve - a handful of programs performing exceptionally well or dreadfully with the bulk somewhere in between.

As the Tribune's Mary Stone reported, that sounds like what the Lewis-Clark State College review produced.

That is, until the state board office intervened.

It wanted an equal distribution of programs among the five rankinfegs ranging from successful to poorly functioning.

In other words, it didn't matter what L-C staffers learned. Some programs would slide into the bottom category to fit the state board's arbitrary standards - whether they deserved it or not.

Sounds like a top-down mandate, doesn't it?

And unlike a Bell curve, a standard distribution produces a predictable number of targets. If you want to put one-fifth on the chopping block, how better than to stick 20 percent on the bottom rung?

Westerberg says it's "not about trying to harvest money."

OK. Then what is it about?

CCheers ... to Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson. He thinks unaccompanied children fleeing drug-fueled violence in Central America should not be sent home without a fair hearing.

Ferguson has filed an amicus (friend of the court) brief in federal court supporting the right of those children to have attorneys plead their cause in a Byzantine process that is "second only to federal tax cases in complexity."

When an attorney argues their case, 41 percent of these children persuade authorities of their right to remain in the U.S.

Without an attorney, only 4 percent prevail.

Says Ferguson: " ... Forcing young children, many of whom do not speak English, ... to represent themselves in inherently complex immigration proceedings, in which their lives may be at stake, does not give them an adequate opportunity to be heard."

JEERS ... to Idaho House State Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Loertscher, R-Iona. Once a profile in courage, he's become a mound of milquetoast.

In 2013, Loertscher - one of Idaho's most conservative lawmakers - made a compelling case for accepting Obamacare's offer to expand Medicaid to Idaho's working poor.

More than 80,000 people would qualify and the federal government would pay almost all the costs.

As the father of Idaho's Catastrophic Health Care fund, Loertscher knew Medicaid expansion would save Idaho taxpayers \$90 million a year in medically indigent costs.

But last week, Loertscher joined two other lawmakers - House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star, and Sen. Steven Thayne, R-Emmett - in opposing Medicaid expansion.

Since Loertscher first raised this issue, we've learned Medicaid expansion will:

- Save 450 lives a year.
- Reduce cost shifting - which drives up private insurance premiums by \$492 million a year.
- Expand Idaho's moribund economy by \$4.8 billion during the next decade.

But Loertscher now says he needs more information.

This is a 26-year veteran of the Legislature, a former county commissioner, a member of the CAT board and a former House Health and Welfare Committee chairman.

He knows all of this.

But he also understands that standing up for Medicaid expansion will put the Tea Party's bull's eye on his back.

When did Big Tom lose his nerve? - M.T.