

Credibility gap

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Sherri Ybarra. Say this for the GOP nominee for Idaho state schools superintendent - you can't make this stuff up.

Not that Ybarra doesn't try.

Just in the last week, she has been caught lying about:

- Her marriage - Ybarra told the Idaho Statesman's Bill Roberts she moved to Mountain Home with her husband in 1996 and that she had been married "nearly 20 years." Turns out she was divorced after moving to Idaho and that she married her current husband Matthew Ybarra in 1999.

When Roberts called her on it, Ybarra said she didn't remember how long she was married or precisely when she was divorced: "My brain doesn't operate in the past."

- Her education - Ybarra has maintained throughout her campaign that she would complete her doctorate in education from the University of Idaho in August. When the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell called the UI, she learned Ybarra obtained an educational specialist degree. That's still a rung above a master's degree and qualifies Ybarra to serve as a school district superintendent. But a doctorate - a degree Ybarra's Democratic rival Jana Jones holds - would require substantially more study, examinations and a dissertation.

Asked to explain, spokeswoman Melinda Nothern said Ybarra changed her mind and applied her credits toward the specialist degree but is still working toward a doctorate. UI confirmed that Ybarra was enrolled in both the specialist and doctorate programs last summer - but prior to that, she was engaged only in the specialist program.

- Her endorsements - During Tuesday's debate with Jones, televised over Idaho Public Television, Ybarra insisted she had the backing of the Legislature's Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee.

JFAC sets budgets. It no more endorses a candidate for state schools superintendent than the Department of Defense picks a candidate for Congress.

But when Jones called her on it, Ybarra doubled down:

"I'm sorry that my opponent is misinformed and she's been gone so long that she doesn't know who JFAC is, but they are listed on my website and they most certainly do support me."

Well, not exactly.

Individual JFAC members are free to endorse anyone. But you can cross off Ybarra's list the four Democratic committee members. That's leaves 16 Republicans. Of those, Ybarra has listed two: state Rep. Maxine Bell, R-Jerome, the committee's co-chairwoman, and Sen. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint, a committee vice chairwoman.

All of this comes on top of disclosures that Ybarra missed 15 of the last 17 elections - including those that involved major education policies - claimed endorsements she didn't have, plagiarized material from Jones' website and sidestepped a presentation to the state school administrators' conference in Boise - only to be seen at a Boise coffee shop the same day.

No wonder former state Superintendent Jerry Evans - a Republican - told Russell he thinks Ybarra is "just almost clueless."

CHEERS ... to Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden. With less than two weeks before the election, Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter is pandering for votes on the same-sex marriage issue.

Wasden is not.

Until the three-member panel of the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals overturned Idaho's same-sex marriage ban, Wasden defended it. But he stood aside while Otter asked all 11 members of the 9th Circuit to reconsider with this flimsy argument:

"The (three-member) panel misunderstood, and for the most part ignored, Gov. Otter's fundamental argument regarding how the panel's redefinition of an institution thousands of years old into a genderless union will negatively impact that institution, and with it Idaho and its citizens, especially children of heterosexuals."

Wasden still believes the federal bench set the bar too high for Idaho to defend its laws and constitution. He may take that argument to the U.S. Supreme Court - or possibly raise it in an entirely different civil rights case.

But here's how you know Wasden isn't playing politics: Either action he takes will come long after the Nov. 4 election.

JEERS ... to Lewiston Republican Mike Kingsley. After mischaracterizing his opponent, Rep. John Rusche's voting record on gun ownership rights, Kingsley is back with a new ad. This one accuses Rusche - the Democratic leader in the House - of not doing enough for education funding.

"Last spring after years of tough budgets, Idaho's Legislature passed the largest education budget since the recession, even though John Rusche voted against it," the ad begins.

Like many of his fellow Democrats, Rusche voted against the GOP school budgets - but not because he thought the state was spending too much. He argued that Otter and the GOP legislative majority continued to short-change education. Six years after they slashed budgets,

lawmakers are still about \$100 million short of restoring public school spending. Yet, Otter and the GOP still diverted millions into tax cuts and rainy day accounts.

If Kingsley knows this, you have to wonder why he'd engage in such a deception.

And if he doesn't know any better, then you have ask why not.

JEERS ... to Idaho County Republicans. What's their answer to low wages? Underfunded schools?

Stagnated economy?

Blame the Democrats.

In a recent ad replete with a red, white and blue elephant, the Idaho County GOP says:

"Voting democrat (sic) will assure redistribution of your money, veterans and all military abandoned, unknown illnesses crossing our unsecured borders. Vote & Keep Our Religious Freedom."

Signing it are county Commissioner Skip Brandt, Clerk Kathy Ackerman, Assessor James Zehner, county commission candidate Mark Frei, Reps. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins, and Shannon McMillan, R-Silverton, and Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood.

Just one question: Who's been running the state of Idaho for the past two decades, anyway? - M.T.