

# Cheers and Jeers Winging it

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. Tuesday, he became the second man elected to a historic third consecutive four-year term.

You'd think he'd have a victory speech prepared.

Perhaps a message of unity after a grueling campaign.

Or a moment of inspiration about better times ahead.

How about a pledge to improve Idaho education?

Even a prayer for guidance in the years ahead?

Nope.

In typical Otter fashion, he started winging it - and his first impulse was to bash gay marriage. Long after Attorney General Lawrence Wasden abandoned the fight as futile, Otter has been racking up legal fees challenging the abolition of Idaho's same-sex marriage ban in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

"I believe our values are strong in Idaho. I believe we're the last ... right now in the United States to stand up for what we believe is traditional marriage," Otter said. " Now if they want to change the other 49 states, go ahead. That's not going to bother me, but why should we change? Why should we leave our values? Why should we leave our moral principles because everyone else is? This isn't what the founders want, that isn't what our creator wanted. ... So we're staying there."

Is Idaho's chief executive going to stand at the border and declare it the last outpost of intolerance?

Brings to mind another governor from another era who decried the coming tide of civil rights and declared: "In the name of the greatest people that have ever trod this earth, I draw the line in the dust and toss the gauntlet before the feet of tyranny, and I say segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever."

Does Otter really intend to follow in the footprints of Alabama Gov. George Wallace?

JEERS ... to Idaho's newly elected Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra. Even in victory, you have to wonder: Is she serious?

First, she issues this prepared statement: "I am honored and proud because they have entrusted me with the position of 'Chief of Schools' and I will do everything I can to defend that trust."

There is no such office as Idaho "chief of schools."

Next, she ducks out. As the Idaho Statesman's Bill Roberts notes, Ybarra faces a long to-do list: the State Board of Education's controversial three-tier teacher licensing plan, a Common Core student achievement test, preparing the new public school appropriation request and building credibility with an education establishment that she hasn't met.

When Roberts inquired, Ybarra's spokeswoman Melinda Nothern declined an interview. Ybarra was taking time off to be with her family, Nothern said.

CHEERS ... to Lewiston School Board member Dale Yochum. As momentum builds behind a local option tax to finance replacing the community's antiquated high school, no voice has been more supportive than Yochum's.

"I've been talking local option for 31/2 years," Yochum said. "Everyone that comes to shop here is going to help pay that tax."

Three times, Lewiston has fallen short of the two-thirds majority required to pass a bond financed by a property tax levy. Taking a page from Nez Perce County, which used a sales tax surcharge to finance its new jail, the school board wants to ask patrons if they'd agree to a similar arrangement.

Doing so, however, requires a legislative blessing.

Before his election to the school board, Yochum was allied with Taxpayers Against Unfair Taxation and campaigned against one bond issue. His backing gives the school board a united front toward winning approval from conservative lawmakers.

JEERS ... to the Idaho GOP. As a caravan of candidates crisscrossed the state last month, it twice used public schools as campaign props.

On Oct. 20, it was met by the Idaho Falls High School band. Four days later, the Republican bus tour pulled up to North Valley Academy, a public charter school in Gooding. As the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell reported, "the entire student body, in the colorful uniforms that are required at the patriotism-themed charter school, assembled on the lawn in front of the school, the school string orchestra played, and the kids sang the national anthem."

That's crossing the line - and if you don't think so, imagine how the Republicans would react if a Democrat pulled this stunt.

Wait.

We already know.

Three years ago, schools Superintendent Tom Luna was fighting teachers who opposed his public education overhaul package. He warned them not to use school time or resources for their political agenda - lest they could lose their certification for unethical conduct.

It's different when a Republican does it.

CHEERS ... to Boise attorney Nels Mitchell. He took on a thankless task - running as a Democrat against U.S. Sen. Jim Risch, R-Idaho. He was inexperienced. He had no money. He was running against Idaho's Republican tide. And he was taking on one of Idaho's most aggressive political personalities. No quarter would be given.

Tuesday's result was predictable: For every vote Mitchell got, Risch picked up two.

It's one thing when a veteran, such as state Rep. Shirley Ringo, D-Moscow, or former U.S. Rep. Richard Stallings, D-Idaho, helps fill a line on the ballot. Even if their cause was hopeless, they were returning favors to a political party that elected them in the past.

But Mitchell had no such debts - and one can easily imagine him spending these past months more enjoyably.

What he did was give you a choice.

Absent Mitchell, Idahoans would have faced their second uncontested U.S. Senate race in a decade.

Or worse.

As a lark, Brooklyn lawyer William Bryk filed for the Democratic senatorial nomination in Idaho. Had Mitchell not stepped in and won the nomination in the May Democratic primary, Bryk would have transformed Idaho's election into a national joke. - M.T.