

# Headed home

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to state Rep. Thyra Stevenson, R-Lewiston. Losing re-election to Democrat Dan Rudolph did not diminish her legendary sense of entitlement.

Consider her appearance at the North Idaho Chamber of Commerce Legislative Tour, where the newly elected Legislature traditionally gathers the weekend after the election.

Stevenson showed up Nov. 9 at the Coeur d'Alene Inn, expecting the goodies of public office to continue flowing her way. But the tour was intended for legislators elected for the 2015-16 term.

Stevenson kept pressing. She might contest the election result, she told tour officials.

Unless next week's recount reverses Rudolph's 26-vote margin, he's in and she's out. Tour officials awkwardly invited Stevenson to attend the welcoming banquet- like any other visitor - provided she was willing to pay the \$50 admission.

Stevenson boorishly refused and left.

Are you surprised? This is, after all, the same woman who upon winning election to the Idaho House in 2012 retained her seat on the Lewiston City Council - and its \$520 a month paycheck - until the second her term expired.

JEERS ... to Idaho County Commissioner Jim Chmelik. This week, he joined fellow Commissioner Skip Brandt in blowing another \$5,000 on Utah legislator Ken Ivory's American Lands Council.

In three years, that's \$15,000 of Idaho County tax dollars spent on the fallacy that the state can sue the federal government into surrendering 20 million acres of forest and range land.

Attorney General Lawrence Wasden's office has cited both federal and state constitutional reasons why it won't happen. Even the leaders of a legislative task force who rejected Wasden's advice and paid a private attorney more than \$60,000 are backing away from a courtroom confrontation.

As are lawmakers in Utah, Montana and Nevada.

But Chmelik is adamant that handing \$15,000 over to Ivory is better than spending it at home: "I don't see the return on welfare, food stamps, (etc.)," he told the Tribune's Kathy Hedberg.

OK. How about following this advice from Derek Farr of Grangeville: Stop being so generous. Ivory is willing to settle for a \$1,000 contribution. Spend the rest of the money on county roads, equipment or employees.

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. Every day he avoids rebidding the Idaho Education Network contract puts taxpayers and students at greater risk. Otter is going back to court - with a private attorney who has so far billed \$875,000 - to contest 4th District Court Judge Patrick Owen's ruling that Otter's best pal and former Department of Administration Director Mike Gwartney bungled the contract.

More than five years ago, Gwartney changed the rules after the bidding process favored Syringa Networks LLC and handed the \$60 million project to the politically wired Qwest (now CenturyLink). Owen said that violated Idaho's procurement laws and voided the contract.

But Idaho courts are not the real arbiters here. The Federal Communications Commission - which had paid 75 percent of IEN's bills - pulled out more than a year ago, costing the state \$11.5 million so far. The bill could reach \$20 million by next year - to say nothing of the \$15 million the FCC may demand Idaho repay.

Until the governor admits his error and starts fresh, the feds aren't coming back.

What's he waiting for?

CHEERS ... to state Rep. Judy Boyle, R-Midvale. You don't get much more Republican than this four-term House member who lobbied for the Idaho Farm Bureau and served as natural resources director for the late U.S. Rep. Helen Chenoweth-Hage.

Yet the language she unleashed upon Otter's handling of the IEN debacle - as well as the scandal surrounding the Corrections Corporation of America prison management contract - is breathtakingly frank.

In an op-ed she wrote: "It is back-slapping, good old boy networks, winks and nods, cover ups, denying involvement, blaming others, attacking those asking questions or with the courage to say the emperor has no clothes."

Of course, you have to ask: Where was Boyle when her seatmate, former House Speaker (and Secretary of State-elect) Lawrence (Boss) Denney, R-Midvale, was undermining ethical standards within the House?

JEERS ... to House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star. A 15-member task force has tied itself into a pretzel producing a politically palatable way of bringing health insurance to people too poor to qualify for federal subsidies but unable to qualify for Medicaid.

Even three conservative lawmakers on that panel - Sens. Lee Heider, R-Twin Falls, and Steven Thayne, R-Emmett, and Rep. Tom Loertscher, R-Iona - got behind a plan that essentially accepts Obamacare's offer to expand Medicaid to about 80,000 low-income adults. Their hybrid model would use some of these federal dollars to purchase private insurance coverage for people subsisting just above the poverty line, while providing Medicaid to those living below it.

Moyle, the panel's fourth lawmaker, refuses to support it. Dooming the plan to failure would cost Idaho taxpayers \$90 million, health care consumers \$492 million in cost-shifting, the state's economy as a whole \$4.8 billion during the next decade and condemn an estimated 450 Idahoans to a premature death every year.

CHEERS ... to Bill Deal. After eight years as director of the Idaho Department of Insurance, Deal is stepping down. He presided over tremendous upheaval in that industry brought on by Obamacare, the creation of Idaho's state-based health insurance exchange as well as other changes in insurance management and regulation the state mandated.

Deal also served 16 years as a lawmaker from Nampa. As the governor noted, Deal's department has been a stand-out: "I hate to think where we would have been for the past eight years without Bill Deal at the Department of Insurance." - M.T.