

Old Butch is back

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. Remember those warm and fuzzy campaign ads where Otter reinvented himself as the guy who was going to pump \$350 million into education during the next five years?

"We've got \$35 million back in the classroom," he boasted. "And we put broadband into every high school. And now I have a 20-point education plan that will fund additional technology and reinvest in our teachers so they're amongst the best in the nation."

Of course, that was when Otter's Democratic rival, A.J. Balukoff, was hammering away at the governor's woeful record, which included cutting education deeply to free up cash for tax cuts. Under Otter, the state was ranked 51st in the financial commitment behind each of its students.

Now safely re-elected to a third term, Otter told the Associated Taxpayers of Idaho Wednesday he wants to cut taxes on the rich and his corporate cronies even more.

He wants to fully repeal the property tax businesses pay on equipment - an estimated \$120 million break that would go primarily to big outfits such as Clearwater Paper, Micron, Idaho Power and Simplot.

And Otter would continue reducing state income tax rates - which haven't been this low since 1934 - from 7.4 to 7 percent. The price tag on that could be \$80 million.

Otter has presided over a low-skill, low-wage economy that relies on poorly funded public schools and skyrocketing college tuition. Pulling \$200 million out of a budget that otherwise would go to restore recession-era cuts in schools is doubling down on his failed economic strategy.

JEERS ... to U.S. Sen. James Risch, R-Idaho. He played the partisan card this week, blasting away at the Senate Intelligence Committee's exposure of CIA torture. Joining with Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla, he complained Democrats had hijacked the process. They had refused to interview individuals. They had relied on a paper trail.

"We voted against this report because it is flawed, and voted against declassifying this report because we believed that its release could put American lives at risk, be used to contribute to propaganda against the United States by our enemies, and damage U.S. foreign policy and counterterrorism efforts."

But where is Risch's indignation about waterboarding?

Or extreme sleep deprivation?

What's his view of rectal rehydration?

Does it bother him that at least 26 detainees were wrongfully imprisoned?

Or that the United States apparently violated its own standards without getting much credible intelligence?

Is his conscience troubled by hearing what Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz, had to say?

"Our enemies act without conscience. We must not," said McCain, who suffered abuse at the hands of his North Vietnamese captors while a POW. "This executive summary of the committee's report makes clear that acting without conscience isn't necessary, it isn't even helpful, in winning this strange and long war we're fighting. We should be grateful to have that truth affirmed."

OK, Sen. Risch, where's your heart? Your soul? What really matters to you? The floor is yours.

JEERS ... to state Rep. (and Secretary of State-elect) Lawrence (Boss) Denney, R-Midvale. His resolution demanding "the federal government imminently transfer title to all of the public lands within Idaho's borders directly to the state of Idaho" launched Denney's two-year odyssey as co-chairman of a legislative task force charged with bringing that about.

Nothing dissuaded him. Not the law. Not economics. Not public opinion. As evidence piled up, the task force this week signaled it will pursue a more conciliatory approach toward the feds.

So Denney is revising history.

"We really don't care who has title to the land," he said. "We want to see it managed."

JEERS ... to Sen. Chuck Winder, R-Boise. Denney's public lands task force co-chairman just couldn't believe what deputy Attorney General Steve Strack was telling him: That the state had no legal basis for suing the federal government into relinquishing millions of acres.

"We've hired legal counsel from outside of state government," Winder told the Montana Environmental Quality Council at Helena this spring, "primarily because we didn't feel as the Legislature that we were getting the help that we needed from the attorney general's office once they determined the legal prospects of the case against the federal government on this didn't have much merit."

So Winder's committee hired former U.S. Interior Solicitor Bill Myers of Boise and paid him more than \$61,000. And what did Winder learn?

"We've been advised by the attorney general and by our own discussions that we probably don't have a lot of legal footing at this stage, at least an identified theory to pursue from a legal aspect," Winder said this week. "So if we pursue it, it will probably be from a political process

that may take some time, and by some time, this could be something that's ongoing for 10, 15, 20 years before some different direction is really established."

Seems we've heard that before - at far less cost.

CHEERS ... to Secretary of State Ben Ysursa. As he's about to close a four-decade career in the state's chief elections office, the City Club of Boise presented Ysursa with the Dottie and Ed Stimpson Award for Civil Engagement.

Ysursa defended Idaho's citizens redistricting commission. He resisted those who pushed to close Idaho's traditionally open GOP primary election to all but registered Republican voters. And he sued a stealthy independent committee supporting the Luna laws to disclose that its money came from out-of-state millionaires, including former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

What a contrast with his elected successor. Denney helped to close the primary and sought to muzzle the redistricting commission.

Ysursa does not fear the worst about Denney taking over next month: "I don't think there will be a lot of changes. If there are, there'll be people coming out of the woodwork, and I'll be one of 'em." - M.T.