

Disoriented?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest. The Idaho he depicted to the White House press corps aboard Air Force One en route to Boise Wednesday could not have been more bogus.

Why President Barack Obama chose Idaho to plug his State of the Union theme of "middle-class economics" was something of a mystery. Rather than following Obama's path of taxing the rich to prop up middle-class education and incomes, Idaho's all-Republican leadership has stuck with trickle down policies.

The results: The rich pay less. The schools are faltering. Idaho has morphed into a low-skill, low-wage economy that is bumping along the bottom on virtually every national metric.

Nobody expected Obama to rub Idahoans' noses in that. At least the president's spokesman should realize he's landing in the Treasure Valley, not Silicon Valley:

"... [O]ne of the interesting things that they're doing very well in Idaho is making the kinds of investments that are important to ensuring that they have a skilled, well-trained workforce. That's had important economic benefits for the state of Idaho. It's also had important economic benefits for middle-class families."

You'd think a planeload of the country's best journalists would poke holes in that scenario:

Such as the fact that Idaho's financial commitment to each of its students is dead last in the country.

So is the percentage of its high school graduates going on to college.

Or that Idaho incomes are among the lowest - if not the lowest - in the country.

And that economic forecasters see Idaho growing a bumper crop of impoverished households - while the middle class continues to erode - during the next four years.

Makes you wonder what Obama's White House doesn't know about Mississippi.

JEERS ... to Idaho GOP Chairman Steve Yates and Executive Director David Johnston.

When the White House announced Obama was coming here, some Idahoans just cringed with anxiety.

It didn't matter that any presidential visit is an honor.

Or that it offered Idaho the opportunity to showcase one of its major universities.

Or even that the family of Saeed Abedini, a man Iranians have imprisoned for two years, could plead for his release.

Even staunch Republicans such as Congressman Raul Labrador had the good grace to welcome Obama to their home.

But you just knew some partisan dimwit would forget his manners.

Such as Johnston. Speaking to Boise's KTVB, he described the president's pending visit as "disrespectful" and just a public relations ploy. He then invited Obama to remain in Washington, D.C.

"I think the majority of Idahoans find it troubling he is coming to Idaho and just using us as a prop," Johnston said.

Yates sent out a tweet in agreement: "Obama Boise visit - More time given to Dem side of story but IDGOP ED Johnston represents the majority view well."

CHEERS ... to Ilah Hickman. The Boise eighth-grader is that rare 14-year-old with a passion for the legislative process.

Like lots of Idaho kids, Hickman got a practical lesson in politics when, as part of a fourth-grade exercise, she lobbied in favor of designating Idaho's giant salamander as the official state amphibian.

That's how Eagle sixth-graders got the Appaloosa named Idaho's state horse in 1975.

It's how Sandpoint area fourth-graders got the huckleberry proclaimed as the state fruit in 2000.

In fact, the list of Idaho's dozen or so emblems ranges from the Peregrine Falcon (state raptor) to the Hagerman Horse (state fossil).

Unlike most students, Hickman has stayed with it, returning year after year, doing her homework and building her case.

But in turning her away, House State Affairs Committee members such as Don Cheatham, R-Post Falls, and Kathleen Sims, R-Coeur d'Alene, came up with this nonsensical argument: By declaring the giant salamander its state amphibian, Idaho would invite the dreaded federal government into declaring it an endangered species.

Even after Attorney General Lawrence Wasden's office assured them otherwise, Cheatham and Sims persisted.

Rep. Ken Andrus, R-Lava Hot Springs, just doesn't like the creature that bedeviled him as a young boy.

"They were ugly," he said. "They were slimy. And they were creepy."

This from a politician?

CHEERS ... to Washington Lt. Gov. Brad Owen. You can't carry an umbrella or a protest sign into the legislative galleries in Olympia. But you could walk right in carrying an assault rifle. Who knew?

Not the Seattle Times' Danny Westneat.

Not until groups protesting passage of Washington's common-sense background check initiative showed up armed to the teeth.

"Nobody stops you if you walk into the Capitol wearing a trench coat with your finger on the trigger of a semi-automatic assault weapon. ... Yet, ... we're supposed to get worked into a freedom lather that somebody somewhere else could theoretically get popped for loaning a gun to a friend?"

Fortunately, Owen, the Senate's presiding officer, banned open-carry on his side of the Capitol.

By Monday, leaders of the House followed his lead with a policy of their own.

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. If he wants to disregard advice from Idaho Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra, let Otter say so.

But don't wave the state constitution in her face.

Case in point: Ybarra's argument to field test the controversial plan to tie improved teacher salaries to a tier-licensing plan. Rather than disrupt Idaho's 115 school districts with another untested, top-down mandate, Ybarra has suggested three pilot projects - at small, middle-sized and large districts.

No can do, says Otter.

Spending extra money in a few districts would violate Idaho's constitutional requirement for uniform and thorough education, he says.

Then, how come Idaho distributed technology dollars through competitive grants?

Isn't this the same governor who two years ago conceded

Idaho's financial commitment to public schools "probably" falls short of meeting that constitutional standard? - M.T.

