

Wrong side, Sherri

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho State Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra. Talk about blowing it.

Earlier this week, Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter outlined a \$101.1 million boost for schools. It's not nearly enough to cover the losses Otter and lawmakers imposed on education during the Great Recession. But it is a healthy number.

What happens next, typically, is the state schools leader presses for more money.

Not Ybarra. In a precedent-shattering move, she's asking for \$87.1 million - a full percentage point below Otter's 7.4 percent increase.

As Idaho Education News' Clark Corbin reports, there are significant differences between how Otter and Ybarra would spend the money - including whether to give local educators greater flexibility. Ybarra's friends also insist she may pursue a more robust request when she appears before the Legislature's budget committee Jan. 29.

But the damage is done. The one person Idahoans elected to speak up for public education just gave lawmakers political cover to shave \$14 million off Otter's budget.

CHEERS ... to Idaho House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley. He put the issue of equal rights front and center.

For nine years, Idaho lawmakers hit the mute button whenever someone complained about the state permitting employers to fire, demote or mistreat gay workers, landlords to evict lesbian tenants and business people to turn away customers because they were transgender.

Idaho does not prohibit discrimination on the basis of "sexual orientation and gender identity."

Even as the list of Idaho cities adopting their own anti-discrimination ordinances grew to 10, including Moscow and Lewiston, the Senate State Affairs Committee refused to consider changing the law.

Apparently, things looked little better in the House State Affairs Committee. So Bedke took matters into his own hands Wednesday. As speaker, he controls the Ways and Means Committee - which Bedke maneuvered into formally introducing a human rights bill.

That guarantees a hearing and a committee vote. The measure remains headed toward a chilly reception in the State Affairs Committee. Nonetheless, it is progress.

JEERS ... to Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Washington, and Congressmen Raul Labrador and Mike Simpson, R-Idaho. Wednesday, all three joined with their Republican colleagues to:

- Deport more than 600,000 youngsters whose parents brought them to this country illegally and through no fault of their own. The vote would delete President Obama's 2012 policy to issue work permits to those children. Even 26 Republican House members - including Nevada's Joe Heck and Washington's Dave Reichert - found that too much to stomach.
- Deport more than 4 million people who would leave behind spouses and children who are legal residents if not citizens of this country. That means hurting the economy, breaking up families and paying higher welfare bills.
- Theoretically hold the \$40 billion Homeland Security budget hostage if Obama does not agree to these changes - just as events in Europe show that's a dangerous idea..

For the sake of argument, assume McMorris Rodgers, Labrador and Simpson are responding to presidential overreach. The fact remains the House abdicated its responsibility to pass immigration reform, giving Obama the opening to issue executive orders.

Constantly saying no is not a solution.

CHEERS ... to Otter. Giving states the means and authority to collect sales tax owed on online and remote purchases needs a push - and Otter delivered it Monday.

"Simply put, every dollar of sales tax from online purchases that goes uncollected is the better part of a dollar that is not going to support the necessary and proper roles of our state government - especially meeting the education and infrastructure needs of our growing economy," Otter said in his State of the State address.

Not collecting sales taxes on transactions Idahoans make online and through remote sites costs the state an estimated \$103 million - according to a University of Tennessee study. Meanwhile, it puts Idaho's brick and mortar retailers at a competitive disadvantage because state law requires them to collect the 6 percent tax.

For years, conservative lawmakers have resisted joining the Streamlined Sales Tax Agreement - an alliance of 24 sales tax states, including Washington - which lobbies for federal legislation and has implemented agreements with more than 2,300 retailers to voluntarily collect and remit taxes to the governments.

Otter's timing could not be better. The Marketplace Fairness Act got bogged down in the U.S. House after the Senate passed it two years ago.

JEERS ... to Lewiston Mayor Jim Kleeburg and the city council. Monday, every federal office, every state agency, every courthouse and just about every city across the state of Idaho will close its doors as a gesture of respect for the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Every city, that is, except Lewiston.

Even Caldwell - which had been another holdout - has taken some steps toward recognizing the human rights holiday.

Lewiston's elected leaders came close. On Jan. 5, they weighed trading one of the 12 paid holidays city workers take - including a floater dubbed " I need a beer, a deer or a steelhead day" - to allow the city to observe Martin Luther King-Idaho Human Rights Day.

For whatever reason - whether it was union representatives who viewed this issue through the narrow prism of collective bargaining agreements or councilors focused on the cost - they opted to wait another year.

What does this say about Lewiston?

JEERS ... to state Sen. Michael Baumgartner, R-Spokane. Along with Sen. Doug Ericksen, R-Ferndale, he's responsible for giving 17 of the Senate's 49 members a veto over any tax increase.

But Baumgartner didn't live by his own standard. His rule requiring any tax increase to get a two-thirds vote in the Senate passed by a simple majority, 26-23.

This is partisan overkill. Republicans control the chamber. Why spit in the face of the Constitution and the Supreme Court?

Washington is anywhere from \$2 billion to \$4 billion in the hole. Taxes are part of the mix.

As much as Baumgartner likes gridlock, what's the rush? It's only January. - M.T.