

Tacit approval?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Benewah and Latah county Democrats. They've said not so much as a peep in the nearly two weeks since the Moscow-Pullman Daily News' Terri Harber yanked the covers off some political skullduggery in their backyard.

Last fall, the Idaho Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee set up a dummy political action committee - dubbed Patriot PAC - and then spent \$1,200 trying to fool conservatives into peeling away from Republican Caroline Nilsson Troy and supporting independent David Suswal in the race for retiring state Rep. Shirley Ringo's House seat.

Had it worked, the ploy would have sent Democrat Gary Osborn to Boise.

Sen. Dan Schmidt, D-Moscow, is treasurer of the campaign committee.

After Troy defeated Osborn by 606 votes, St. Maries Republican Ken DeVries established who was behind the deception.

Local Democrats weren't involved. But they've been conspicuous by their silence. Ringo has been the only prominent Democrat to speak up. Elsewhere on this page, she characterized the affair as an "ill-advised caper" that ought not be repeated.

But where is Latah County Democratic Chairman David Nelson?

Has anyone heard from Benewah County Democratic Chairwoman Cheryl Halverson?

By remaining quiet, they are tacitly lowering the bar for ethical campaigning. Why should anyone take their complaints seriously if Republicans follow suit?

JEERS ... to state Rep. Joe Schmick, R-Colfax. He's signed up with five eastern Washington lawmakers - including Reps. Matt Shea, R-Spokane Valley, and Larry Haler, R-Richland - to revive the region's perennial secession fever.

Tired of being dragged along by Puget Sound's tilt toward higher spending, electing Democrats to statewide office, approving same-sex marriage and legalizing marijuana, these five have sponsored House Bill 1818.

Taken to its logical conclusion, the bill would lower the Cascade Curtain and establish a separate state on the east side.

"This is one way to get their attention," Haler told the Tri-City Herald.

Of all people, Schmick ought to know better.

The 9th Legislative District includes not only Washington State University but also a sprawling network of highways - all of which are propped up by western Washington's economic engine.

For instance, for every \$1 Asotin County sends to Olympia, it gets \$1.24 back.

Whitman County gets nearly \$1.12 back for every \$1 it pays.

So what are you proposing here, Rep. Schmick? Independence means your constituents will pay more taxes and get less in return.

JEERS ... to state Rep. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins. A year ago, he came up with arguably the dumbest idea of the entire session - nullifying the Environmental Protection Agency.

Shepherd thinks suction dredge miners ought to continue operating in the Salmon River in spite of the EPA's conclusion that it violates the Clean Water Act.

Even former Rep. - and now Secretary of State - Lawrence (Boss) Denney, R-Midvale, had to concede Shepherd's plan "does perhaps go too far and is likely unconstitutional as written."

This year, Shepherd is back with a convoluted, three-page bill declaring as a matter of state law that the EPA has drawn the wrong conclusions and therefore lacks authority to act.

Nobody's fooled. Same song. Different verse.

CHEERS ... to Frank VanderSloot. The chairman and chief executive officer of Idaho Falls-based Melaleuca is Idaho's wealthiest individual and according to political historian Randy Stapilus - the state's fifth most influential citizen.

For much of his life, VanderSloot has used that influence as a cultural warrior. In the late 1990s, he purchased billboards across the state challenging a public television program addressing the needs of children of gay parents. In 2008, VanderSloot's wife Belinda contributed \$100,000 toward blocking same-sex marriage in California.

But VanderSloot has put his influence on the right side of history - declaring that Idaho lawmakers should protect the civil rights of gays, lesbians and bisexuals on the job, in housing and in public accommodations.

"Attacking, judging or discriminating against people because we do not agree with them should not be accepted by our society. Neither should such discrimination be protected in the state of Idaho," VanderSloot wrote in an op-ed published Sunday in the Idaho Falls Post Register. "I have no doubt that sexual orientation is not a 'choice.' Someone does not 'choose' to be gay."

VanderSloot has reserved judgment concerning whether

Idaho's human rights law ought to protect transgender people.

"I do not pretend to understand the legal nuances with the term 'gender identity.' Therefore, I have no opinion as to adding those words," he wrote. "However, I'm a strong advocate of amending the Idaho Human Rights Act to include the words 'sexual orientation.' "

But he's far ahead of the Idaho House State Affairs Committee, which last week voted along party lines to block a human rights law.

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. Almost a year ago, he signed Idaho's guns on campus bill into law - a measure that puts concealed weapons into the hands of students, faculty and staff on public college campuses.

"As elected officials, we have a sworn responsibility to protect and defend the Constitution of the United States - not only when doing so is easy, convenient or without cost, but especially when it is not," Otter wrote.

Translation: Like every other elected Republican in the state, Otter had no desire to take on the National Rifle Association - which promoted this bill against the opposition of students, parents, law enforcement officers, campus presidents and the State Board of Education.

Turns out Idaho's institutions of higher learning will spend about \$3.7 million on new security measures to respond to the law. As the Idaho Statesman's Bill Dentzer reports, the University of Idaho's share comes to \$580,000.

All of which will bite students' wallets through higher tuition. Otter's budget - which is \$4 million short of paying for his promised 3 percent salary boost for faculty and staff - has nothing in it to cover these additional security costs.

As far as the governor's concerned, it's NRA all the way, but the students get to pay. - M.T.