

Fling away, Paul

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to state Rep. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins. For most, it's just another week in the state Capitol. For Shepherd, it's another chance to fling mindless vitriol at minorities.

Shepherd thinks it would be swell if Congress impeaches any judge who recognizes same-sex couples' constitutional right to marry. His non-binding measure to that effect is a dog whistle on same-sex marriage.

But Shepherd has injected slavery into the debate. Last week, he suggested slaveholders were good Christians with bad ideas.

Confused?

Wednesday, Shepherd clarified his remarks to Idaho Public Television's Melissa Davlin:

"They (slave owners) weren't terrible, rotten horrible people," he said - just people who made terrible decisions. "And that's how I see gay people."

Slave owners held human beings in bondage. If a slave missed a work quota, he could be whipped or beaten. If he disobeyed or committed some slight offense, he could be shackled.

Slaves were burned, mutilated and branded.

Some were killed. Others were raped. Families were destroyed.

All of this was done in the name of profit. And these slaveholders refused to stop until a bloody Civil War freed their captives.

What would you call someone who equates the monstrous institution of slavery with someone's sexual orientation or gender identity?

"Terrible, rotten, horrible" would be a good start.

JEERS ... to state Rep. Shannon McMillan, R-Silverton. The signature act of the 2015 legislative session is a commitment to boost teacher pay by \$125 million during the next five years.

By the time the teacher career ladder bill cleared the House Monday, virtually everyone was on board - Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter, the education community, most Republicans and Democrats.

Everyone, that is, except McMillan and seven of her colleagues - including Reps. Vito Barbieri, R-Dalton Gardens, Joe Palmer, R-Meridian, and Mike Moyle, R-Star.

So what was McMillan's reason?

"I'm not going to explain my vote," she told the Tribune's William L. Spence and walked off.

Since when does McMillan assert the divine right of kings? She is an elected representative. No more. No less.

Her constituents have every right to know why she voted to keep Idaho's teacher salaries in the nation's basement.

Unless, of course, McMillan won't explain her vote because she can't.

Does she blindly follow Barbieri, Palmer and Moyle without making up her own mind?

JEERS ... to U.S. Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. School districts in north central Idaho just dodged a budget bullet, no thanks to him.

Thursday, Labrador opposed a two year extension of Secure Rural Schools funding for timber communities that have been struggling through the loss of national forest timber sale receipts.

Of Idaho's \$28 million share, \$7.6 million goes to Idaho County alone. Another \$1.3 million is allocated to Clearwater County.

When Congress passed an omnibus spending package late last year, it ignored SRS. All of which left schools in the lurch. For example, Mountain View School District depends on SRS for about 10 percent of its budget. With property taxpayers already footing a \$2.6 million supplemental levy, the district would have been forced to shed teachers, staff and programs, including athletics.

The SRS rescue was attached to a larger bill stabilizing Medicare reimbursement rates - a bipartisan package worked out by Speaker John Boehner and Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi. Only 37 House members opposed it. Among them were Labrador's allies in the ultra-right contingent including Michigan's Justin Amash, Texas' Louie Gohmert and North Carolina's Mark Meadows.

It's another step along Labrador's path of redemption with an ideological base that felt abandoned by his vote for Boehner's re-election.

But when Labrador's constituents in Grangeville, Riggins and Orofino need help, they'll have to rely on Washington's 5th District Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers and Idaho's 2nd District Congressman Mike Simpson - who voted for SRS - to look after their concerns.

JEERS ... to Washington state Auditor Troy Kelley. The one official responsible for rooting out mismanagement and poor judgment throughout state government is hiding out amid reports that federal investigators raided his home in Tacoma, are rifling through his income tax records and served a subpoena on his state office.

At the time of his election in 2012, the former legislator already faced allegations of improprieties in his business dealings. For instance, he was accused of sheltering \$3.8 million in an offshore tax haven.

But his denials - and the heavy-handed methods his Republican rival James Watkins employed in unearthing the charges - persuaded voters to give him a chance.

Federal officials aren't talking, and neither is Kelley. After returning to work Monday, he has refused to disclose what documents he's turned over to the feds. He hasn't met with reporters. And Wednesday, Doug Cochran, Kelley's chief of staff, directed press aide Thomas Shapley to stop talking about the investigation.

Nothing short of a felony conviction, impeachment or a successful recall campaign can drive Kelley from office. But what makes him think he has the right to test the public's patience this way?

JEERS ... to Idaho House State Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Loertscher, R-Iona.

Just about every week, there's another reminder why Lewiston Rep. John Rusche's call for a state inspector general's office makes sense. Just take your pick. Millions squandered on a botched Idaho Education Network. Millions more lost on a malfunctioning Schoolnet program.

Then there is the U.S. Department of Justice investigations into both the IEN and mismanaged private prison contract.

Or the latest corruption index that puts Idaho among the most tainted states in the country. About the only thing Idaho does right, according to the State Integrity Investigation, is to keep its politicians from gerrymandering legislative and congressional district boundaries.

When it comes to holding the governor or Legislature accountable, Idaho gets a solid F.

A month ago, Rusche proposed establishing an office to look into complaints of waste, fraud and abuse. A slim majority on Loertscher's panel agreed to consider it.

But the chairman has locked Rusche's bill away in his desk

drawer. What is Loertscher afraid of? - M.T.