

Riding to the rescue

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

CHEERS ... to Idaho state schools Superintendent Sherri Ybarra. Give her credit for this much: She has surrounded herself with a talented staff. Among them are her interim chief deputy Pete Koehler, who earlier pulled the Nampa School District out of a deep financial hole, and her chief technology officer, William Goodman, who had been director of technology at Mountain Home and president of the Idaho Education Technology Association.

That's in stark contrast to Ybarra's predecessor, Tom Luna, who prized political acumen above all else.

With Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's mismanagement, the \$60 million Idaho Education Network is in tatters. Legislative budget-writers turned to Ybarra's office to resuscitate broadband for the schools.

Goodman's technical skill and knowledge of the classroom earned him credibility with lawmakers.

With just weeks to pull it off, Goodman and his team managed to help line up broadband for 129 different school districts, charters and education programs across the state - all without disrupting any student's education. Seeking out alternatives to IEN contractors Education Networks of America and CenuryLink allowed schools to save 37 percent. And because some schools picked up additional bandwidth, the cost per megabit dropped 61 percent.

At a time when Idaho was desperate for competence in government, Ybarra came through.

JEERS ... to U.S. Sens. Jim Risch and Mike Crapo, R-Idaho. Risch has spent six years on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Crapo has been a fixture in Washington, D.C., since Bill Clinton's first inauguration.

Why are they following the lead of 37-year-old Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark, a man who has been in the Senate 10 weeks - and possibly playing right into the hands of the hard-line mullahs of Iran?

Risch and Crapo joined Cotton and 44 other Republicans in trying to blow up President Barack Obama's negotiations to delay Iran's nuclear weapons program.

In a letter bordering on condescension, the GOP senators suggest Iran's leaders pay attention to the details of American governance - and argue without congressional approval, any pact Obama strikes will leave office with him.

"The next president could revoke such an executive agreement with the stroke of a pen and future Congresses could modify the terms of the agreement at any time," they write.

Even those who advocate some form of congressional ratification are aghast. No less than the Wall Street Journal editorial page fears it will drive away Democratic support from any congressional oversight measure. "... It's a distraction from what should be the main political goal of persuading the American people."

Talk about setting an awful precedent. Do you really believe Democrats now will be restrained from injecting partisanship into any future Republican president's diplomatic initiatives?

Here's hoping foreign affairs journalist Jeffrey Goldberg has it all wrong. More important than how the talks succeed, Goldberg writes in the Atlantic, is who's deemed responsible if they fail.

"It is not in the best interest of the United States to provide Iran any excuses to walk away from the table, and to provide Russia, China and America's various European and Asian allies with arguments against strengthened sanctions," Goldberg says. "Republicans in the Senate may believe they were doing the U.S. a favor by issuing their warning to (Supreme Leader) Ayatollah (Ali) Khamenei, but advocates of crushing sanctions against Iran might just have undermined their own cause."

Seven Republicans - among them Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Bob Corker, R-Tenn., - refused to sign Cotton's letter. That alone should have given Risch and Crapo pause.

Come home, Sens. Risch and Crapo. Explain yourselves.

JEERS ... to Washington Senate Majority Leader Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville. Along with 29 others, Schoesler voted to put the interests of Washington's payday loan industry ahead of the consumers.

Six years ago, lawmakers put limits on lenders such as Washington-based Moneytree. No company could write more than eight two-week loans to any individual in one year. That off-ramp forced lenders to come up with a less profitable repayment package.

At Moneytree's request, Schoesler and his colleagues passed a bill that stretches out loans to six months. Payday lenders stand to make more money. Consumers are likely to wind up deeper in debt.

"We are creating a situation where people will default and will continue to put themselves in a greater and greater cycle of debt," said Sen. Pramila Jayapal, D-Seattle.

JEERS ... to former U.S. Sen. Larry Craig, R-Idaho. Eight years after he got arrested in a Minneapolis airport rest room for soliciting gay sex, Craig continues to find new ways to embarrass himself and shame his home state.

Craig took hundreds of thousands of dollars contributors gave him in good faith that he would spend on a 2008 re-election campaign he never waged - and hired a team of attorneys who tried to erase the guilty plea he entered in Minneapolis.

To mollify the Senate Ethics Committee, Craig insisted his airport antics were "purely personal conduct unrelated to the performance of official Senate duties." The committee didn't buy it.

Then, when the Federal Elections Commission argued spending campaign dollars on a private matter was illegal, Craig reversed himself - claiming he was on official business in Minneapolis.

The FEC didn't agree.

Neither did U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson, who ordered Craig to repay \$197,535 and pay a \$45,000 fine.

Now Craig is before the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia with this new angle: Arresting officer Sgt. Dave Karsnia expressed his dismay at Craig's behavior: "I guess I'm gonna say I'm just disappointed in you, sir. I expect this from the guy that we get out of the 'hood.' I mean, people vote for you."

Craig says that shows he was on official business.

How do you think Karsnia learned Craig was a United States senator?

Because Craig pulled rank on the cop - flashing his Senate business card and then saying: "What do you think about that?"

Is there anything Craig won't say or do? - M.T.