

Say that again?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS... to Idaho County Commission Chairman Jim Chmelik. He's complaining about using \$2.5 million in Bonneville Power Administration ratepayer dollars to restore a two-mile stretch of Crooked River.

Dredge mining during the 1930s left behind tailings that diverted the river into a zipper-like course. Restoring the natural channel would help the recovery of anadromous fish - whose numbers have been decimated by the dams feeding BPA's power grid.

But Chmelik says it's a waste of money - especially when the community's schools and roads are short of cash.

Isn't he the same fellow who so enthusiastically deposited \$15,000 of Idaho County taxpayer funds into the bank account of Utah Rep. Ken Ivory's American Lands Council?

What has that accomplished? Even the Idaho Legislature's public lands task force has abandoned Ivory's folly of suing the federal government into submitting its public lands to the states.

Of course, Ivory has done OK for himself.

Writing in the St. George, Utah, Spectrum, Iron County, Utah, Democratic activist Leigh Washburn noted she looked over the American Lands Council's tax records and found Ivory paid himself \$95,000 in 2013.

Ivory paid his wife, Becky, another \$19,714.

So why does Chmelik consider fixing a legacy of environmental degradation a waste - but putting your tax dollars in Ivory's pocket an investment?

JEERS ... to Genesee Mayor Steve Odenborg and the city council. In defiance of Idaho's "Sunshine Week" - which celebrates transparency in government - Genesee's elected officials took Idaho's Open Meeting Law, shredded it, stomped on it, poured lighter fluid over it, set it ablaze with a dozen lighted matches and then tossed the blackened mess into a solid waste landfill.

Locked in negotiations with the Latah County Library District, Genesee city councilors are demanding a \$250 a month lease payment for the Genesee branch.

How, members of the audience asked during Tuesday's city council meeting, did the panel arrive at that number?

Because, as Councilor Art Lindquist acknowledged, the council voted via email. Lindquist said he made the motion and Councilor Edie McLaughlan seconded it.

How does that fit into an Open Meeting Law that requires all votes to be taken in public? If there was an executive session, where was the public notice?

Says the Open Meeting Law manual: "The use of a telephone to conduct such discussions does not remove the conversation from the requirements of the Open Meeting Law. Similarly, members of a public board may not use computers or texting to conduct private conversations among themselves about board business."

That same manual notes elected officials can face a \$50 penalty - which escalates to \$500 if it turns out they knowingly broke the law.

CHEERS ... to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee. The protests of Senate Majority Leader Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville, notwithstanding, Inslee is acting responsibly in drawing up contingency plans for a partial state government shutdown.

It's entirely possible lawmakers won't pass a budget by July 1, when the new fiscal year begins.

It almost happened two years ago - and since then, the problems have become even more complex.

The House is controlled by Democrats.

Republicans run the Senate.

They disagree about how to come up with the \$2 billion in new money for public schools Washington's Supreme Court has demanded.

There's debate about a transportation bill.

Don't forget the voter-approved class-size initiative that adds another \$4 billion to the state's budget gap.

And finally, there's the \$800 million it will cost to give public employees the first pay increase they've had in six years.

Both sides are talking - but they are far apart. It's not a simple matter to bring a \$38 billion enterprise to a halt. Inslee's only being prudent by preparing for the worst.

JEERS ... to state Rep. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins. He's still pushing a non-binding legislative memorial urging Congress to impeach any federal judge who recognizes a same-sex couple's constitutional right to marry.

To no one's surprise, the GOP members of the House State Affairs Committee went along with this idea.

Don't let the U.S. Constitution get in the way of a good political rant. Shepherd hasn't. As reported by the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell, Shepherd somehow weaved the story of Christian slave owners into his argument.

"Their Christian moral beliefs were that blacks were inferior," Shepherd said. "They thought they were good Christians, good moral people, and I'm sure most of them were. But it just proves that our interpretation of Christian morals can be very far and wide. ... So I have no disrespect for anyone that sees it different than I do. But ... this has to get settled. Marriage is too important to the future of our society to just roll over and let this go."

Confused? So is state Rep. Linden Bateman, R-Idaho Falls. The former history teacher argued the Founding Fathers would be just fine with letting the states discriminate.

"If you're going to give all the power on the federal government, it can come back to bite you, I'll tell you," Bateman said. "States discriminate. There's no question about it, and it's wrong. But when should the federal government come in and try to correct everything the states do? If they do that, then we've got a centralized society."

CHEERS ... to House State Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Loertscher, R-Iona. On Jan. 19, Loertscher's panel decided to kill Boise eighth-grader Ilah Hickman's bid to have Idaho's giant salamander designated as the state's amphibian. Hickman's been pushing this ever since she was in the fourth grade. Last year, she even got it passed in the Senate, only to have the House refuse to hear it.

But as he watched the House debate a resolution observing "National Diaper Need Awareness Week," Loertscher had a pang of conscience.

"If we've got time to talk about diapers on the House floor, we've certainly got time enough to talk about the giant salamander," Loertscher declared.

So in an abrupt about-face Wednesday, the panel approved Hickman's bill and sent it to the House for approval.

Good for Loertscher. - M.T.