

Fundamental foul-up

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. Nothing is more vital to a governor's prestige - as the head of a separate branch of government - than his power to veto legislation. Only with his constitutional authority to proclaim "I forbid" does the governor stand alone, forcing the Legislature to accede to his demands or override him with a two-thirds vote.

Yet here was Otter carelessly mishandling the process.

Otter was at odds with the Legislature's decision to eliminate instant racing machines - in other words, slots - at race tracks in Post Falls, Garden City outside Boise and Idaho Falls. But the measure had cleared each chamber by more than a two-thirds majority.

Any governor in that situation would drag things out and line up just enough support to sustain his veto. Otter lent that impression when he announced he would take the full five days the constitution allowed him to make his decision.

The deadline fell at 4:54 p.m. Saturday.

Contrary to popular impression, stamping veto on a bill does not suffice. Otter had to return the bill to the chamber where it originated - in this case, the Senate. A deadline falling on a Saturday is no excuse. He could slide the bill under the Senate presiding officer's door - although Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill, R-Rexburg, was at his desk until about 3 p.m. that day.

This is not news.

Idaho's Constitution spells it out.

A 1978 Idaho Supreme Court decision added more definition.

Previous weekend vetoes have been handled in this fashion.

Except now.

Although he showed Hill the vetoed bill on Friday, Otter physically retained possession of it until Monday when he announced his decision and delivered his veto message.

He may have a legal leg to stand on. For instance, he may claim the Legislature was adjourned during its three-day Easter Day weekend recess, and therefore the deadline did not apply. Or he can argue the Senate ultimately voted to sustain his veto in spite of these constitutional questions.

But that's beside the point.

Otter is in his ninth year as governor.

He spent six years in Congress.

He served 14 more as lieutenant governor.

And Otter was in the Idaho House for three terms.

For him to screw up something this fundamental leads to one inescapable conclusion:

Gov. Otter is incompetent.

CHEERS ... to Sen. Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston. He was among only 10 Republicans in the entire Legislature who stood up to his party's blatant raiding of the public purse.

To maximize its influence in the presidential sweepstakes, Idaho's GOP abandoned the state's traditional presidential primary, held in May, in favor of selecting its national convention delegates during the Super Tuesday caucuses in March.

Idaho Democrats have been holding presidential caucuses for some time.

But the GOP is tired of spending money on its caucuses and is turning to the taxpayer for a bailout - in the form of a \$2 million March presidential primary. The cost to Nez Perce County alone is more than \$115,000.

Unless it decides otherwise by the end of November, the party won't allow anyone other than a registered Republican to engage in that primary. That's bad news for Idaho's 363,447 unaffiliated voters - who either must officially join the party or stay home.

All of this was just fine with most Republican lawmakers, who passed it 50-19 in the House and 23-11 in the Senate.

At least Johnson wasn't having any of it.

JEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. Labrador and his colleague, 2nd District Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, disagreed about extending the Secure Rural Schools program, worth about \$28 million a year to Idaho's beleaguered timber communities, for two years. Simpson voted yes. Labrador voted no.

SRS was part of a broader Medicare funding package and Simpson said someone would "have to look long and hard to find a reason to vote no."

That irked Labrador, who last week told Boise public radio: "Mike Simpson has been part of the establishment in Washington, D.C., for 12 years. He loves to go out drinking and smoking with the Speaker (John Boehner). He loves to have these relationships where it's all about making false promises to his constituents and then going back there to Washington, D.C., to

compromise," Labrador said. "We're different kinds of politicians. I will not lie to my constituents. I won't say something in my campaign that is totally different than what I do during my time as a member of Congress. ... People of his district obviously like him and they keep re-electing him, but he's got to answer to his constituents when he takes votes like this."

Simpson is not afraid to take tough stands or defend them at home - whether it was opposing a 1990 anti-abortion bill in the Idaho House, fighting anti-tax guru Grover Norquist or even advocating new wilderness protections for Idaho's Boulder-White Cloud range.

No wonder he's been challenged by his party's right wing in the GOP primaries.

This is character assassination, pure and simple.

To see Labrador so erratically engaging in such behavior can only undermine your confidence in his judgment.

CHEERS ... to Chelsea Gaona Lincoln of Caldwell. She more than met state Rep. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins, halfway.

The author of a non-binding measure urging Congress to impeach any federal judge who recognizes a same-sex couple's constitutional right to marry, Shepherd told Idaho Public Television's Melissa Davlin: "They (slave owners) weren't terrible, rotten horrible people." They were just people who made terrible decisions "and that's how I see gay people."

Lincoln, a gay woman, urged Shepherd to meet with gays and transgender persons. Initially, Shepherd agreed to a forum but then withdrew.

Joined by two colleagues, Lincoln met privately with Shepherd, state Rep. Janet Trujillo, R-Idaho Falls, and former state Rep. Cindy Agidius, R-Moscow - who is the House GOP's communications director.

"I'll be honest," Lincoln wrote later. "Agidius did most of the talking, not Shepherd."

Nonetheless, she credited Shepherd for hearing her out.

"In the end, Rep. Shepherd said he didn't intend his comments to be hurtful," Lincoln said. "I believe him. I take him at his word." - M.T.