

# Means tested

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to state Rep. Susan Fagan, R-Pullman. Today, she ends her legislative career in disgrace for stealing from the taxpayers.

Could these be the same taxpayers Fagan claimed to be defending these past five years?

Google Fagan and the phrase "We must live within our means."

You'll find it when the former staffer for Idaho Republican Sens. Jim McClure, Steve Symms and Larry Craig launched her campaign for the Washington House in 2009: "I think we're going to be electing more people who feel that way as well. We haven't figured out, in Olympia yet, how to live within our means."

You'll find it when Fagan first went to Olympia in 2010: "We need to learn to live within our means. I don't think the voters are asking the state to do anything different than they are doing."

Whether it was cutting back on help for the mentally or physically disabled in 2010 or refusing to come up with more money for public schools in 2013, Fagan's answer was always the same: "When I look at the economy and the number of people I know who are looking for jobs, probably the most responsible thing we can do is live within our means."

It was the same story earlier this year when Fagan blasted Democratic tax proposals: "So many of you have earnestly asked we live within our means - just like you do every day with your personal finances."

Fagan's personal finances include her \$42,106 legislative salary plus the \$120 per diem she accepts for every day the Legislature is in session. That worked out to \$12,360 for this year's 88 days in Olympia.

Apparently, Fagan found her means unlivable.

At least twice, Fagan made up fictitious official appointments so that the taxpayer covered the cost of a campaign event - which is a violation of state law. At least once, she did so in order to cover the expense of working at a campaign booth at a county fair.

She also inflated her mileage in order to drain an unlimited House travel account rather than rely on her own office funds, which were capped at \$6,500.

Investigators say Fagan took several thousand dollars "and perhaps more."

And Fagan browbeat legislative staffers into helping her falsify the vouchers. One staffer quit over it.

"I am uncomfortable being left here to continue to be her scapegoat," a Fagan assistant told investigators. "I feel a bit like that goat on 'Jurassic Park,' tied up, waiting to get eaten alive."

Fagan had the chance to do the right thing in December when House Chief Clerk Barbara Baker first raised these allegations. She should have quit then. Instead, Fagan dragged things out as long as possible.

Even with the charges confirmed and House Republicans forcing Fagan's hand, last Friday she still released a constituent letter stating that, "as soon as a budget is ready, I will be called back to Olympia (sometimes on a moment's notice) to vote."

Nowhere in that note, however, will you find Fagan urging her colleagues to live within their means.

JEERS ... to Washington Senate Majority Leader Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville. When a bill came up to plug a loophole in the state's campaign finance Sunshine Law, Schoesler helped to block it.

The source of so many television attack ads, independent campaign committees are covering up where they get their cash. It's aptly called "dark money" because if you don't know who's behind the smear campaigns, you can't judge the motives.

The tactic has been applied to both sides of the political spectrum.

Earlier this year, the GOP-controlled state Senate unanimously approved a bill requiring disclosure and the Democratic-led House voted in favor by a 2-to-1 margin.

As it circled back to the Senate for final approval, the measure drew resistance from GOP campaign contributors.

Ever since the GOP tied things up on a procedural vote, Schoesler has been making excuses.

Here's one example: The Senate needed to devote its limited time to education and the state budget.

Of course, as the Seattle Times observed, pressing Senate business was placed on hold for 10 minutes to honor the Federal Way High School basketball team.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Nonprofit Center Executive Director Janice Fulkerson. She's behind the third annual Idaho Gives campaign.

Set for May 7, the event gives ordinary Idahoans the opportunity to donate to some 665 nonprofits across the state. Just get on [Idahogives.org](http://Idahogives.org) and use the web page to choose a recipient by region, name or category.

Not only is it convenient and confidential, but the process has virtually no overhead. All the money goes where it's needed.

There's no pressure. And no commercials.

When launched in 2013, Idaho Gives raised more than \$500,000.

Last year, it collected more than \$800,000.

The nonprofit center is hoping to break the \$1 million threshold this year.

JEERS ... to U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, both R-Idaho. Thursday, they sought to tamp down the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell's report that the GOP senators were ignoring female applicants for the U.S. District bench being vacated by retiring federal Judge Edward Lodge.

Of course, women and men are being interviewed for the job, they said.

That's good to know.

But where did anyone get such an idea?

Could it be that five prominent women - including a sitting judge and two prosecutors - told Russell they applied for the post but were not interviewed?

Among them are two women you'd expect to be on any short list - U.S. Magistrate Candy Dale and U.S Attorney Wendy Olson.

Could it be that Risch and Crapo are doing this all behind closed doors? Back in the 1990s, then-Sens. Larry Craig and Dirk Kempthorne used a "vetting committee" to publicly review applications, a process that led to the appointment of U.S. District Judge Lynn Winmill.

Or could it be Idaho's abysmal record of not appointing women to the bench. As of 2012, Idaho ranked last in the nation with only 11.3 percent of its judicial appointments handed to women. With Iowa, it shares the distinction of having an all-male state Supreme Court. And it is the only state in the region served by the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals to have no woman seated on the U.S. District Court. - M.T.