

Chutzpah, anyone?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

D JEERS ... to George Nash and his fellow Clarkston city councilors. Monday, with the exception of Brian Kolstad, they promoted asking residents to cough up another 0.2 percent sales tax surcharge - taking the rate to 7.9 percent.

Clarkston could use the extra \$450,000 for its streets, they say.

Talk about spendthrifts.

Remember the 0.3 percent Asotin County surcharge that was supposed to put the Asotin County Family Aquatic Center in the pink?

Clarkston siphoned off 85 percent of it, or more than \$550,000, plus another \$250,000 windfall generated by Walmart's relocation. In the middle of a recession, the city promptly went on a binge - creating a redundant ambulance service, hiring more staffers and building new city offices.

When the money ran dry, Clarkston's councilors cut off the paltry \$160,000 they had allocated to the aquatic center, sending that facility into a financial tailspin.

The only solution was to raise local taxes. Again.

This time, however, the county formed a recreation district so Clarkston could not get its paws on a new 0.2 percent surcharge - worth about \$500,000 - that voters volunteered to pay two years ago.

The classic definition of chutzpah is having the temerity to beg a judge's mercy because, having murdered both of your parents, you've become an orphan.

Just like that orphan in that courtroom, Nash and his colleagues are saying all of this with a straight face.

JEERS ... to U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, R-Idaho. Nine months ago, 81-year-old U.S. District Court Judge Edward Lodge announced he would be taking senior status, effective July 3.

Where's the nominee? Who knows?

When the last federal bench vacancy occurred in the 1990s, their predecessors - Larry Craig and Dirk Kempthorne - did everything by the book. They used a "vetting committee." They operated in the open. Ultimately, President Bill Clinton appointed B. Lynn Winmill.

But Crapo and Risch have resorted to stealth and vague assurances. By taking this long, Crapo and Risch have left Idaho's federal courts - and the people who rely on them - in the lurch. With only Winmill working full time, you can count on a two-year delay before getting a trial date for your civil claim.

Now it turns out the state is functioning under a "judicial emergency" declared by the Judicial Conference of the U.S. Courts.

Even if Crapo and Risch produced a name tomorrow, replacing Lodge is months away. The White House has to act. There's a background check as onerous as any in the federal establishment. The American Bar Association will conduct its evaluation. Finally, the Senate Judiciary Committee will conduct its hearings - and with the August recess looming, that may stretch into next year.

All of which has fueled some cynical talk about Crapo and Risch dragging out this process past President Obama's term - in the hopes of getting a better deal from any Republican elected next year.

Of course, playing partisan games with the federal courts is something Crapo and Risch would never do.

Would they?

CHEERS ... to Eric Peterson of Lewiston. Chairman of the Lewiston Disability Advisory Commission, Peterson is rallying support for a behavioral health recovery center in Nez Perce County.

It's the same idea taking shape at centers planned for Latah County next month and three other sites scattered across Idaho: provide a support network for people recovering from mental illness or substance abuse.

What Peterson needs is a \$125,000 start-up grant through the Idaho Millennium Fund - and to get that, he needs to demonstrate public support.

When you enable a person to function in the community, that's one less person who may wind up in the criminal justice system. It's one less person getting treatment in the hospital emergency room. It's one less suicide.

If you want to look through the cost-benefit analysis lens, every dollar spent on preventive care may yield anywhere from \$5 to \$7 in savings.

JEERS ... to Nez Perce County Deputy Prosecutor Nance Ceccarelli. Her office apparently stepped over \$28,000 in an attempt to pick up another \$718 in property taxes.

Barry and Robin Schultz told the county it overvalued their Cougar Ridge home. Blasting from a nearby rock pit had damaged the structure, made it difficult to insure and less desirable to would-be buyers.

In 2010 and 2013, the Idaho Board of Tax Appeals agreed, slicing \$33,000 from the county's \$236,000 assessment. When the county took the case to 2nd District Court Judge John Stegner in April, he found for the Schultzes and further lowered the home's assessed value to \$180,000.

Then Ceccarelli told Stegner the Schultzes weren't entitled to recover their attorney fees because the case involved review of government agency actions.

Not so. Three years ago, the Idaho Legislature specified attorney fees and costs could be awarded in any proceeding.

Stegner ordered the county to fork over \$28,000, and took Ceccarelli to task.

Was Ceccarelli simply not up-to-date on the law?

No. She told the Tribune's Joel Mills she knew about the Legislature's action, but had to come up with some sort of argument.

What do the Idaho State Bar's Rules of Professional Conduct say about knowingly making "a false statement of fact or law" to a judge?

JEERS ... to U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Ernest J. Moniz. If he doesn't know how his agency is mangling public confidence in the Idaho National Laboratory near Idaho Falls, he'd better find out.

Consider DOE's heavy-handed response to former Idaho Gov. Cecil D. Andrus' public information request about the proposed shipment of 220 pounds of spent nuclear fuel to INL.

Andrus and former Gov. Phil Batt are protesting that move, contending the DOE has not lived up to its 1995 agreement to treat and remove nuclear wastes from Idaho.

Andrus wanted to know how long DOE had been working on these shipments, why it chose the INL and whether it planned to send more spent fuel to Idaho.

What he got back was 128 pages, most of it redacted - except for newspaper clips and Andrus' own letter.

Is it any wonder Idahoans do not trust the DOE? - M.T.