

Cheers & Jeers What's next?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Washington state Rep. Mary Dye, R-Pomeroy. Flush with victory in her own campaign Tuesday, Dye was equally tickled that voters approved Initiative 1366.

"I see this as the chickens coming home to roost," Dye told the Tribune's William L. Spence. "Voters have asked us how many times before to require a supermajority for tax increases, but the Legislature keeps overturning (those previous initiatives). This gives us a chance to do what the voters have requested: keep the discipline on taxes and not just a simple majority."

I-1366 is the latest of initiative entrepreneur Tim Eyman's measures to require any tax increase to win a two-thirds vote in the House and Senate. Dye is right: Previous legislatures have suspended Eyman's work and passed tax bills by a simple majority - although Eyman's critics point out members of Dye's party also circumvented these measures when it suited them.

What's new here, however, is Eyman's dangerous precedent. Ever since the Supreme Court ruled he could not impose a two-thirds majority mandate without amending the state constitution, Eyman has been stymied. Only the Legislature can launch such an amendment and doing so requires a two-thirds vote in each chamber.

So Eyman has resorted to extortion. I-1366 lowers the sales tax from 6.5 percent to 5.5 percent, pulling \$8 billion from the state budget during the next six years. Eyman's willing to back off only if lawmakers approve his two-thirds rule as a constitutional amendment.

And that should give Dye pause. She represents a sparsely populated district that stands to lose any political shoot-out with King County voters.

For the sake of argument, say Puget Sound puts its electoral might behind an initiative to pull state funding out of eastern Washington's highway and bridge network - essentially holding it hostage until lawmakers from this end of the state pass a constitutional amendment creating a state income tax.

What would Dye say then?

JEERS ... to former Idaho state Rep. Phil Hart, R-Hayden. Here we go again.

Hart famously refused to pay income taxes and used his office as a shield against compliance. (After 10 years in the House, the voters threw Hart out in 2012.)

Although the feds seized his Athol log home to cover more than \$586,000 in income tax debt, Hart still refuses to pay the more than \$53,000 he owes to the citizens of his state. Nor has he ever made full restitution on the \$22,827 worth of trees he took from state endowment lands to build that log house.

As the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell reported Tuesday, Hart placed the winning bid for his house at an Oct. 1 IRS auction - \$202,740 on the 10-acre property.

He put down a \$23,260 deposit. The balance was due Oct. 22. Hart hasn't paid. And he waited until the last possible minute to ask for more time.

Nobody forced Hart to evade paying taxes. Nobody forced him to bid on this house. But now he wants preferential treatment.

CHEERS ... to Idaho schools Superintendent Sherri Ybarra. Ever have the sense her predecessor, Tom Luna, was either flying blind or reinventing the wheel?

Here's one explanation: Under Luna, the state no longer participated in the Education Commission of the States.

The Denver-based consortium is an objective, credible clearinghouse about national and state education trends.

Of course, Luna was a businessman who never spent a minute teaching. Politics, not pedagogy, was his mantra. So why would he care about learning what works in other states and what practices are best to avoid?

Ybarra, who came from the Mountain Home schools, is fluent in education.

So, as the Tribune's Mary Stone noted, Ybarra has renewed Idaho's membership in the commission. Ybarra's office resumed paying dues to the commission on Sept. 29 - \$22,685 covering the period through the rest of the fiscal year that ends on June 30.

JEERS ... to Idaho state Rep. Gary Collins, R-Nampa, chairman of the House Revenue and Taxation Committee, and Sen. Jeff Siddoway, R-Terreton, chairman of the Senate Local Government and Taxation Committee. Together, they head up a legislative tax working group that is flirting with more tax cuts.

Look over who Collins and Siddoway invited to their meeting Tuesday:

- Idaho Freedom Foundation President Wayne Hoffman.
- National Federation of Independent Business State Director Suzanne Budge.
- Associated Taxpayers of Idaho President Ben Davenport.
- Idaho Retailers Association President/CEO Pam Eaton.
- Idaho Society of Certified Public Accountants lobbyist Ken McClure.

Hoffman called for tax cuts. Others offered a more nuanced view. But the only person called before the panel to offer a contrarian view was Lauren Necochea, director of the Idaho Center for Fiscal Policy.

No teachers were asked about how cutting taxes might undermine efforts to repair damage legislative neglect has inflicted on the schools.

Nobody asked a college student how round after round of tax cuts have driven up the cost of tuition.

And nowhere did you find a member of Idaho's working or middle class, who might ask why lawmakers want to make the state's tax system harder on them while reducing the burden on upper-income families.

No wonder, when this panel meets again next month, it will continue undeterred in its focus on cutting income taxes, personal property and sales taxes.

JEERS ... to U.S. Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah. The chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee has been standing in the way of reauthorizing the Land and Water Conservation Fund, a 50-year-old program that spends offshore oil and gas royalties on public lands.

For instance, those dollars helped secure conservation easements that kept ranchers on the land while protecting the pristine scenery of the lower Salmon River Canyon from Hammer Creek to the confluence with the Snake River.

Bishop's latest bill would thwart such efforts. Until a new bill passes, conservation efforts will lose \$2.46 million every day.

Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, serves on Bishop's committee.

Give his office a call. - M.T.