

# Cheers and Jeers: Convention edition

Mary Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho state Treasurer Ron Crane.

No, he didn't lose another \$8.7 million of your tax dollars by manipulating public investments.

He didn't tour Manhattan in first-class style while on the state's business.

Crane didn't stick you with another \$8,000 gas bill for his commute to work.

And he was not spreading more lucrative contracts to politically friendly financial institutions.

All he did this time was embarrass the state - a little.

Serving as the Idaho delegation's mouthpiece at the Republican National Convention Tuesday, Crane told the world: "Idaho is the most Republican state in the nation. We are so Republican that when we say the Pledge of Allegiance, it's 'To the Republicans for which it stands.' "

As Crane noted, Idaho has elected no Democrat to statewide or congressional office - and the GOP holds 80 percent of the Legislature.

But why take a swipe at the 46.5 percent - or nearly 205,000 people - who voted for someone other than Republican C.L. "Butch" Otter for governor two years ago? Or, for that matter, why insult the 166,487 people who chose Democrat Deborah Silver over Crane in 2014?

Why stop with trivializing the Pledge of Allegiance?

Imagine what Crane might do with:

- The Declaration of Independence - "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Republicans are created equal ..."
- The Preamble to the Constitution - "We, the Republicans of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union ..."
- The Gettysburg Address - "... Government of the Republicans, by the Republicans, for the Republicans ..."
- The U.S. motto - "In Republicans, we trust."

JEERS ... to the Republican National Convention's platform committee. Under the chairmanship of Sen. John Barrasso, R-Wyo., the party of Teddy Roosevelt and Richard Nixon would transfer 640 million acres of federal public lands to the states - which would have no choice but to sell them off to the highest bidders.

The platform calls for the following: "Congress shall immediately pass universal legislation providing for a timely and orderly mechanism requiring the federal government to convey certain federally controlled lands to the states."

Let's just assume nobody on that panel consulted with Idahoans. For more than two years, legislators who wanted to force a federal lands transfer kept running up against uncomfortable facts.

Among them: It's unaffordable. At Congressman Mike Simpson's direction, the Congressional Research Service figured managing the national forests, rangelands and some wildlife facilities would cost Idaho something close to \$500 million a year.

Unless the state logged those lands as aggressively as our grandfathers did in the 1960s and 1970s - and found perpetually profitable timber markets - the University of Idaho Policy Analysis Group found Idaho would lose money on the deal.

So you'd be stuck with raising taxes, cutting school budgets or selling off the lands to balance the budget.

Once you explain those options to people - as the Boise State University Public Policy Survey did earlier this year - Idahoans' support for the position the national GOP just adopted collapses - from 56.3 percent to 39.3 percent.

If you doubt it, ask Idaho County Commissioner Jim Chmelik. The state's most ardent proponent of grabbing control of those lands will be out of a job come next January. And the people who blocked his re-election last May were not crazed environmentalists and Democrats; they were Republican primary election voters.

JEERS ... to Idaho GOP Chairman Steve Yates. If you're looking for a political cheerleader, he's your man. But don't expect much more.

From the instant it emerged that Melania Trump's speech to the GOP national convention Monday lifted whole passages from first lady Michelle Obama's address to the 2008 Democratic National Convention, Republicans had a choice.

Some played it straight:

"It just shouldn't have happened," Matt Latimer, who wrote speeches for President George W. Bush, told the New York Times.

"It's like some guy trying to paddle across a river in a rowboat who shoots a hole in his boat," Mitt Romney's speech writer Stuart Stevens told the Times.

But as long as the Donald Trump campaign was ducking, weaving and spinning - it refused to come clean until Wednesday - Yates parroted the party line: "I really doubt anyone has a copyright on these ideas. ... To me, this is a cheap shot."

Would Yates be as charitable had a Democrat plagiarized whole sections of Ronald Reagan's speeches?

CHEERS ... to Washington Superintendent of Public Instruction Randy Dorn. You can argue his lawsuit against seven of Washington's largest school districts - including Spokane - is a political stunt.

But what else is he to do?

It's been four years since the Washington Supreme Court ruled the state was not meeting its constitutional obligation to fund public education. The state has a 2018 deadline to find at least \$3 billion to \$4 billion - but lawmakers have been in contempt of the Supreme Court ruling for two years and have been facing \$100,000 a day sanctions since last year.

So schools are forced to rely on property taxes to pay the bills. That's all well and good if you happen to be in a wealthy school district. But if your child attends class in a district with a less robust tax base, there are simply fewer resources to go around.

Dorn's lawsuit targets those property tax levies as illegal because they enable "the Legislature to evade its duty to amply fund education."

CHEERS ... to Idaho state Sen. Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston. Johnson is co-chairman of a legislative working group looking into a loophole in state law that allows parents to withhold lifesaving medical care from their children because they choose prayer instead.

Idaho is among six states with such a law.

Johnson's panel meets Aug. 4.

Until now, legislative leaders - notably Senate Health and Welfare Committee Chairman Lee Heider, R-Twin Falls - have refused to even consider reforms. That's in spite of evidence that children are dying. In 2013, the last year on record, the Idaho Child Fatality Review Team documented five newborns who died from faith healing.

Staging the forum will force the conversation: What is the state's obligation to its children and how should parental rights be balanced against those of their offspring?

In a state as conservative as Idaho, one can only imagine the political resistance to asking those questions. This takes no small amount of courage on Johnson's part. - M.T.