

Cheers and Jeers: Left behind

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter. His decision to replace Bill Goesling of Moscow with Albertsons executive Andrew Scoggin of Boise leaves north central Idaho the odd man out on the State Board of Education.

The governor is under no legal obligation to maintain a geographical balance on the state board. But certainly that's been the practice.

In fact, someone from Latah County has served on the state board since 1991, when then-Gov. Cecil D. Andrus appointed attorney Roy Mosman.

In 1998, Gov. Phil Batt replaced an ailing Mosman with former House Speaker Tom Boyd, R-Genesee.

Three years later, Gov. Dirk Kempthorne appointed former Moscow Mayor Paul Agidius.

And five years ago, Otter selected Goesling.

Geography is not destiny. For instance, there is no more ardent advocate for the University of Idaho than state board President Emma Atchley of Ashton, a former president of the UI Foundation.

Still, of the seven people Otter has named to the state board, three - former West Ada School Superintendent Linda Clark and former Idaho National Laboratory Deputy Director David Hill and now Scoggin - are from Ada County.

That leaves just one northerner - Don Soltman of Twin Lakes, north of Coeur d'Alene - on the state board.

This involves a vast area running from the Ada County line to Worley. It encompasses two of Idaho's four institutions of higher learning.

Why is Otter ignoring it?

JEERS ... to Otter, again. The governor has a bad habit. Rather than rely on Attorney General Lawrence Wasden's staff, Otter prefers to burn through hundreds of thousands of dollars hiring outside counsel.

As Idaho Education News' Kevin Richert reported this week, Otter has retained the Washington, D.C., firm of Harris, Wiltshire and Grannis to seek recovery of nearly \$2 million in federal e-rate dollars claimed by Idaho schools.

The Federal Communications Commission shut off those funds when the Idaho Education Network contract blew up. That fiasco stems from Otter's former administration director, Mike Gwartney, steering the \$60 million project, which brought broadband to high schools, toward politically influential companies.

That's on top of the following:

- Otter's appointees on the Idaho Transportation Board hired the Boise law firm of Holland and Hart to defend against former Director Pam Lowe's wrongful termination lawsuit. The transportation board paid Holland and Hart more than \$600,000.
- Otter spent \$55,000 on private lawyers, including Gene Schaerr of Washington, D.C., to defend Idaho's ban on same-sex marriage - even though Wasden's office also was engaged in the case.
- Idaho paid lawyers at the Boise firm of Hawley Troxell about \$1.1 million to defend the bungled IEN contract.
- And rather than rely on the nationally recognized expertise of Wasden's natural resources division, Otter turned to Boise lawyer Tom Perry to pursue his challenge against Interior Secretary Sally Jewell's sage grouse recovery plan. As of the end of the year, Otter had paid Perry - who spent a decade in state government, including a stint in the governor's office - \$142,000 for two months work.

If he did nothing else during that time, Perry was earning more than \$400 an hour. Wasden's shop would have charged no more than one-seventh that amount.

How does Otter justify that?

Not on results.

Lowe collected a \$750,000 settlement.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled marriage equality was the law of the land, Idaho included.

The Idaho Supreme Court declared Gwartney's mishandling of the IEN matter corrupt and voided the contract - which could lead to even more litigation.

Otter has pledged he will spend no more than \$7,500 on his latest escapade of legal outsourcing. But don't bet on it.

JEERS ... to U.S. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho. Look among the GOP senators who say they can't support Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump.

There you will find Susan Collins of Maine, Jeff Flake of Arizona, Mike Lee of Utah, Mark Kirk of Illinois and Ben Sasse of Nebraska.

But Crapo - who is seeking a fourth term in the Senate - still stands by Trump.

How? Ask Lewiston resident Bob Whitlock.

An Air Force veteran, Whitlock cornered Crapo last week during his swing through the Idaho State Veterans Home. Unknown to Crapo, Whitlock was recording him when he asked about Trump besmirching Sen. John McCain's status as a hero because the Arizona Republican was captured and spent five years in a North Vietnamese POW camp.

"I didn't like that," Crapo said.

What about Trump offending Gold Star mothers with his tirade against Khizr and Ghazala Khan, parents of a soldier killed in action?

"I don't think he intended to offend the Gold Star mothers," Crapo said. "I think they're making him sound like that. ... He shouldn't have done it. He shouldn't have said it."

And when Trump accepted a Purple Heart with these words - "I always wanted to get the Purple Heart; this was much easier" - how did Crapo react?

"That's not right, either," he said.

Crapo readily conceded Trump has "said stuff that's hard to defend."

But the alternative - Hillary Clinton - leaves him no choice, Crapo said.

Give the Idaho Republican this much credit: Whitlock didn't catch him saying anything different in private. Still, it leaves you wondering: When, if ever, will Crapo decide party loyalty is too high a price to pay to tolerate a man who says "stuff that's hard to defend"?

CHEERS ... to former Idaho Gov. Andrus. He turns 85 on Aug. 25 - which just happens to be the centennial of the National Park Service.

A full generation has come of age in the 26 years since Andrus waged his last re-election campaign. But he can't walk down the street without being recognized.

His exemplary record - both as a four-term governor and as President Jimmy Carter's interior secretary - is one reason. Thanks to him, 100 million acres in Alaska are under protection and Idaho has public school kindergartens.

Andrus remains in the arena. For instance, he's giving the U.S. Department of Energy fits by resisting its plans to ship spent nuclear fuel to the Idaho National Laboratory near Idaho Falls.

Happy birthday, governor. - M.T.