

Fishy end run

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Darryll Olsen and his Columbia-Snake River Irrigators Association.

They want it all. They want the water stored up behind the four lower Snake River dams to irrigate their produce. And they want the federal government to arbitrarily condemn the Snake River salmon and steelhead runs to extinction - if that's what it takes to maintain their economic interests.

As the Tribune's Eric Barker reported Wednesday, Olsen and the irrigators want President-elect Donald Trump to convene the "God Squad" to circumvent the courts, the Endangered Species Act and the nation's treaty obligations.

A U.S. District Court judge has ordered the federal government to come up with a plan to restore fish runs decimated by the four dams on the lower Snake - up to and including breaching the structures. Also underway is an Environmental Impact Statement, which ought to allow taxpayers to discern whether the dams are a boondoggle.

But rather than wait for the answers, irrigators are betting on Trump's anti-environmental campaign rhetoric. They want him to convene the administrators of the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers, a representative of the state (presumably Washington), and the secretaries of Agriculture, Interior and the Army.

Under a 1978 law, if five of the seven agree, the fish would be allowed to go extinct - in order to maintain the dams.

This is not about a snail darter, silvery minnow or even the spotted owl. In many ways, salmon define the Northwest. "God Squad" that species and you undermine the foundation of the region's ecosystem.

To Olsen, businesses that depend on healthy fish runs take a back seat to irrigators.

Empowering a panel of government insiders to rip up treaties guaranteeing the Nez Perce and Shoshone-Bannock tribes access to salmon doesn't seem to bother him, either.

And he's telling the American taxpayer to shut up and stop asking questions.

How would Olsen like it if a hostile federal bureaucracy treated him in such a capricious fashion?

JEERS ... to Idaho Republican Party Chairman Steve Yates of Idaho Falls. While he denies having anything to do with setting it up, Yates has been quick to defend Trump's decision to accept Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen's phone call.

Trump not only upended four decades of America's "One China" policy, but he also violated this nation's tradition of having one president at a time. Until Jan. 20, Barack Obama sits in the White House and is responsible for setting foreign policy.

Four - or eight - years from now, Trump may come to rue this precedent.

The Washington Post's David Ignatius spoke for many when he wrote: "Whatever else future historians say about Donald Trump's early foreign policy moves, they're likely to note the erratic and, in many ways, self-defeating nature of the president-elect's initial dealings with China, the country many analysts view as the United States' most important long-term rival."

So it's Yates to the rescue.

"These experts need to listen to the American people and the person who was just elected president - not the other way around," Yates wrote Tuesday in the Idaho Statesman.

But which Yates is speaking up?

Yates no doubt would like you to think of him as former Vice President Dick Cheney's national security adviser with an expertise in Asian affairs. But Cheney - in fact, the entire George W. Bush administration - stood by the "One China" policy. And even during the hectic transition period following the 2000 election, you never saw Bush even hint at usurping the constitutional authority of the sitting president, Bill Clinton.

Was it Yates, the party loyalist? If Yates could excuse Trump groping women and making unwanted sexual advances toward them - allegations that infuriated Idaho Republicans such as Sen. Mike Crapo and Congressman Mike Simpson - no mere foreign policy flare-up is going to cause him heartburn.

Or was it the former Taiwanese operative? After leaving the Bush White House in 2005, Yates was employed as a lobbyist for the Taiwanese government for a couple of years.

So says middle-of-the-road Politico and the right-of-center Washington Examiner. Six years ago, the left-wing ThinkProgress chided Newt Gingrich's fledgling presidential campaign when it trumpeted adding Yates to its national security team while obscuring his firm's lobbying contracts, which included a \$1.5 million payout from Taiwan.

Sorry, Steve; your agenda is showing.

CHEERS ... to Lewiston Mayor Jim Kleeburg and the Lewiston City Council.

Is there a more contentious issue than homelessness? Since the ROC homeless shelter opened in North Lewiston, complaints to the Lewiston Police Department are up:

- "Suspicious" - 52 percent.
- "Unwanted person" - 57 percent.
- Trespassing - 68 percent.
- Theft/tampering/vandalism - up 30 percent.
- Abandoned vehicle - up 72 percent.
- Harassment - up 47 percent.
- Intoxicants/narcotics - up 71 percent.

So people have a right to be alarmed. Politically, the easy thing to do here is to keep quiet. But Monday, the councilors spoke truth to a divided community: Homelessness can't be legislated out of existence. It is a product of economic upheaval and mental illness.

You have to find a solution and that requires a community engaged in finding one.

With a six-month moratorium on new homeless shelters in place, the Planning and Zoning Commission is tasked with drafting an ordinance to direct where and how shelters will be allowed.

That's where people on both sides of the issue should devote their energies, Kleeburg said.

"We're not going to tackle this if we don't start making amends with each other and start working with each other," said Councilor Jesse Maldonado. Good for them.

CHEERS ... to three Pullman couples, Terence and Ruth Day, former Mayor Karen Kiessling and her husband, Nick, and Mayor Glenn Johnson and his wife, Kathy.

They've put up \$1,500 as seed money toward the community's hate crimes reward fund.

The idea is help track down people responsible for incidents such as the painting of anti-gay slurs on a Washington State University student's car.

"It's our hope the community will take the creation of this fund to express itself and make a strong statement hate crimes are not going to be permitted in Pullman, Whitman County or the local area," Day told the Moscow-Pullman Daily News' Josh Babcock. - M.T.