

# Going along

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**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**JEERS ... to Idaho Republican Sens. Jim Risch and Mike Crapo. Is there any health care cut so draconian that these two would oppose it?

Tuesday, they dutifully stood with their 50 GOP colleagues to hand Majority Leader Mitch McConnell just enough legislative wiggle room to begin repealing Obamacare.

Then they voted for the Better Care Reconciliation Act - which the Congressional Budget Office says would throw about 22 million people off their health care insurance by 2026. That was too much for nine of their Republican colleagues - including Susan Collins of Maine and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska - who joined with all 48 Democrats to kill it.

Next up was a straight repeal of Obamacare and with it the subsidies and Medicaid expansion that has extended coverage to millions.

Risch and Crapo voted yes. Seven Republicans - including Arizona's John McCain - joined with the Democrats to nix that idea.

Have Risch and Crapo forgotten that Idaho is a poor state where roughly one of every five people lacked health coverage before Obamacare provided subsidized private insurance to more than 87,000 people?

Two years ago, Idaho's uninsured rate had fallen to about 11 percent - it may have dropped even further since then - and that's without expanding Medicaid to another 78,000 people who earn too little to qualify for the federal subsidies.

According to the advocacy group Close The Gap Idaho, Risch and Crapo just voted to raise premiums by 71 percent - which will force many older and sicker people off their policies.

Relying on a generous federal match, Idaho Medicaid covers 185,900 children; another 30,900 disabled children, 27,300 adults - primarily pregnant women - as well as 25,995 seniors and 18,914 disabled adults.

Were Risch and Crapo to prevail, Idaho's lawmakers would be forced to raise taxes or raid education budgets by about \$129 million each year - or slash coverage.

And where did Crapo get this talking point: "With premiums rising and coverage options disappearing, the status quo is no longer an option"?

Not from Idaho's health exchange, YourHealthIdaho. As the Idaho Falls Post Register's Bryan Clark reported last week, the state-based exchange is a success story. It works with four carriers. There has been no exodus. Enrollment is rising about 8 percent. And while premiums have risen about 24 percent, that's in line with the national average.

In dutifully following McConnell, have they forgotten the people who sent them to Washington, D.C.?

CCHEERS ... to Lewiston City Councilors Ryan "RJ" Johnson and Bob Blakey. Johnson couldn't be more right about patching up the Lewiston Civic Theatre building.

Ever since it learned the theater troupe neglected the structure's roof, damaging a large truss to the point where the building was unsound, the city has held a bad hand.

Once the city took possession, it spent enough money - about \$40,000 - to stabilize the building and reopen traffic on Eighth Street. The question now is whether to invest between \$10,000 and \$15,000 patching up the roof and safeguarding the building's stained glass windows.

Councilor Ged Randall says that's putting good money after bad.

But Lewiston already has lost the Raymond House to demolition. Fires took the Weisgerber Building and Bollinger Hotel. If Lewiston spends \$15,000 now, it could essentially mothball the Civic for a year or two.

Monday, Johnson said it's a small price to pay to keep the city's options open toward preserving this one-of-a-kind link to its past. If you don't fix the roof, you guarantee more structural damage and make demolition inevitable.

Says Johnson: I'd rather spend \$15,000 and put it to sleep rather than gamble on spending \$350,000 to wreck the thing."

Good for him.

As for Blakey, here's what he had to say about the Civic: "If I wasn't up for re-election this fall, I'd probably have a strong opinion here. It's damned if you do and damned if you don't."

Foolish?

Ya' think?

But how many politicians have expressed the same thing in a more nuanced way? Or even entertained the same thought without admitting it?

Which do you prefer?

JEERS ... to Whitman County Auditor Eunice Coker. In four years, her office has made six ballot errors.

Most recently, she sent hundreds of ballots printed for Pullman's Ward 1 to voters in Ward 3.

Elsewhere, ballots meant for Tekoa wound up with Oakesdale.

A ballot question involving Rosalia's annexation of Whitman County Fire Protection District No. 7 got mixed up.

A race for the Colfax Hospital District got dropped from 4,000 ballots. Another 700 flawed ballots were distributed in Pullman.

And Washington Secretary of State Kim Wyman's office issued a hugely critical report, finding that Coker's election office had problems in 20 out of 74 areas of review.

Isn't it time to bring in some help?

Elizabeth Siler of Pullman thinks so. In a letter signed by 56 people, Siler asked Wyman' to look over Coker's office.

But Wyman' can't act unilaterally: "It all does boil back down to the auditor has to request our assistance," Wyman's spokesman Erich Ebel told the Tribune's Josh Babcock.

Not so fast, says Coker.

"I'm not refusing to ask the secretary of state for help," she said. "We do ask for it, when it's needed."

It's needed. Call in the cavalry.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Congressmen Raul Labrador and Mike Simpson. Sure, the measure to stiffen U.S. sanctions against Vladimir Putin's Russia passed overwhelmingly Tuesday - 419 to 3.

But in supporting the package first raised in the Senate by Crapo and supported by Risch, Labrador and Simpson have challenged President Donald Trump's neo-appeasement proclivities.

They are also lending support to Crapo and Risch, which - as incredible as it sounds - they need.

The Kootenai County Republican Central Committee just condemned Crapo and Risch for opposing a "progressive globalist agenda."

Since when did northern Idaho Republicans get so chummy with the Kremlin? - M.T.