

Who listens?

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JEERS ... to the Clarkston City Council. Before it embarks on a costly, go-it-alone approach to ambulance service, why not discuss the idea with the city residents who will experience the consequences? That's what Mayor Donna Engle suggested Monday. Her idea got the cold shoulder.

By declining to continue in the valley-wide ambulance service Lewiston provides to Asotin County and the city of Asotin, Engle thinks the city is making a mistake. The city council disagrees.

Doesn't that alone justify taking this question to the public? This is a big step. When the city government is split, there's room for doubt.

CHEERS ...to Washington State University President Elson Floyd. He's putting up \$5,000 of his own money as a reward for leads about who is assaulting women on the WSU campus. Three assaults have been reported, although two of the women who claimed to have been attacked have recanted their stories.

"President Floyd's willingness to use his own personal money to donate to this assault conviction reward fund is a real testament to how serious he is to WSU safety issues," said Kim Barrett, events coordinator for the WSU Women's Center.

CHEERS ... to Boise State University President Bob Kustra. By speaking up on behalf of part-time workers employed at BSU and elsewhere throughout state government, Kustra stood up to Gov. C. L. (Butch) Otter and his administration director Mike Gwartney. Under the Otter administration's plan, part-time state workers will pay substantially more for state health care insurance.

When the system takes effect in mid-November, insurance premiums could jump 10-fold for some employees.

"I just think it's so ironic in this world in which we live that these folks who make these decisions dress up in blue and orange (BSU's colors) and come to seven football games a year and spend two and three months asking me as I travel down the street, 'How's things going with the team? Are we going to beat Oregon?' I just wish once somebody would say, 'How's the lab technician going to handle the 40 percent increase? How is the custodian going to handle the 40 percent increase?' "

Then Kustra took the battle of health care reform to the state's congressional delegation, which opposes a public system. Kustra knows intimately the cracks in America's health care system. After surviving a bout with cancer, Kustra's adult son Steve let his insurance lapse. The cancer returned and Steve Kustra died at 37.

"We are living proof of how for-profit insurance companies and HMOs target people who are sick and who are ill and raise their premiums until they can effectively kick them off of the rolls," Kustra said.

JEERS ... to state Rep. Leon Smith, R-Twin Falls. In her wrongful discharge claim against the state, former Transportation Director Pamela Lowe alleges transportation board member Gary Blick of Castleford said "No little girl would be able to run this department."

Blick's not talking, so the Twin Falls Times-News went to Smith, a former transportation board member.

"From the outset, she's about 5 feet tall and she's a woman in a man's world," Smith said. "She had a tough hill to climb."

Mark up another exhibit for Lowe's court case.

CHEERS ... to six members of Washington's congressional delegation. They've signed on as co-sponsors to a bill repealing the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" law. Under that anachronistic Clinton-era policy, more than 13,000 loyal Americans have been ousted from the military simply because of sexual orientation. Ironically, the policy does not apply to civilians working for the Department of Defense.

President Barack Obama has pledged to repeal the law. The House Armed Services Committee has held one hearing. The Senate Armed Services Committee has one planned in the next 30 to 60 days.

U.S. Rep. Ellen Tauscher, D-Calif., has proposing replacing "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" with a law banning discrimination against gays in the military. She has 168 co-sponsors. Among them are U.S. Reps. Brian Baird, Norm Dicks, Jay Inslee, Rick Larsen, Jim McDermott and Adam Smith, all D-Wash.

JEERS ... to Idaho gubernatorial candidate Rex Rammell, Part I. Anytime Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter does something right, expect Rammell to call him on it.

Otter once famously said he'd be the first to buy a wolf hunting tag if this state issued one. Monday, the tags went on sale. Otter didn't get one.

That shows Otter is "a lot of talk," Rammell told the Twin Falls Times-News.

When someone pointed out Otter missed out on a tag because he was at Lewiston attending funeral services for former Sen. Bruce Sweeney, Rammell said, "That's a lame excuse."

Then Rammell suggested Otter should have gotten one of his aides to go out and get a wolf hunting tag on his behalf. To which Otter spokesman Jon Hanion countered, "The governor has never used the privileges of his office. He's an avid sportsman and like everyone else will stand in line."

JEERS ... to Rex Rammell, Part II. Here's the caliber of Rammell's judgment on display: somebody jokes about issuing hunting tags on the president of the United States, and the would-be governor joins in.

At the mention of the phrase "Obama tags," Rammell said, "We'd buy some of those."

Later, Rammell said he was "being sarcastic. That was just a joke. I would never support him being assassinated."

Good to know. - M.T.