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Looking ahead

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CHEERS ... to Washington State University and University of Idaho students. Their recent protests in the face of deep higher education spending cuts should remind the current generation of politicians that history will not judge them kindly. Governors and taxpayers see only today's bottom line, financially and politically. If they're looking ahead, it's no more than to November's elections.

At WSU, students staged a rally Thursday, showing solidarity with students across the state. Slow to the cause, ironically, was their own student government, which had opted not to participate.

At the UI, Argonaut production manager Kelsey Samuels offered this editorial observation:

The reality of the situation is (Gov. Butch) Otter, along with Idaho legislators, only live so long. Our generation will have to put up with their choices long after they are gone, and we will have our work cut out for us in putting the state's higher education system back together. ...

The J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation has spent \$3 million on a campaign encouraging higher education, saying "High school is only the beginning. Go on. ..."

There's not a whole lot of incentive for students to "go on" when the governor puts education on the back burner.

JEERS ... to the Washington Department of Financial Institutions. The department promoted legislation to withhold from public view any action it takes against a credit union, a bank, a trust company or holding company.

Measures to exempt the department from Washington's public records act now are on hold. Amendments striking those provisions from bills revamping Washington state regulation of financial institutions will be offered sometime soon. But the agency has not totally abandoned its proposal. When you consider the regulators responsible for protecting consumers and businesses placed their initial loyalties with the banks, that's hardly comforting.

If a financial institution draws a rebuke from state regulators, the public doesn't merely have the right to know. It must know.

CHEERS ... to Rep. Grant Burgoyne, D-Boise. He says 90 days is long enough for an Idaho Legislative session. He's sponsoring a constitutional amendment impose that limit. Good for him. When Idaho had a Legislature dominated by farmers, ranchers and people working in fields related to agriculture, sessions were more disciplined. Spring arrived and they departed.

Now, with a more urbanized Legislature, the party never ends. When they get into a standoff - either between the House and the Senate or between the lawmakers and the governor's office - things bog down.

So the length - which costs you \$30,000 a day or more - has been creeping up. At 117 days, last year's session fell just short of setting a record.

Maybe nothing can fix this. If politicians know anything, it's how to drag things out. But nothing focuses attention like a deadline.

JEERS ... to Sen. Mike Jorgenson, R-Hayden Lake. In his zeal to hammer noncitizens illegally in this country, Jorgenson forgot about those foreign nationals who are legitimately residing in the Gem State.

Jorgenson's anti-illegal immigration included a provision that required all driving tests be administered in English.

Sure, that's going to nail any illegal immigrant who signs up for a driving license.

But it also hurts refugees, exchange students and foreign workers. In a state without mass transit, having a car is a ticket to a job, school and a social life.

So Idaho, like many states, is a good host. It offers driver license exams in the languages of its guests.

Jorgenson says he's going to pull the English-only driver's exam provision, but the damage already has been done. When anything even hints at Idaho's reputation for intolerance - undeserved in many cases - the story gets attention.

Google Jorgenson's bill. It's all over the Web.

CHEERS ... to Washington Secretary of State Sam Reed. Joining with state Librarian Jan Walsh, Reed has come to the defense of the State Library. In a column published this week in the Tacoma News Tribune, they contend Gov. Chris Gregoire's proposed \$2 million budget cut would force the library to lose one-third of its staff.

"Over the past decade, in good times and bad, the state library has been put through the budget wringer several times," they wrote. "If Gov. Gregoire's proposed cuts become reality, the state library's budget will have been reduced by more than a third, and its staff level slashed by more than half since 1999."

If implemented, the cuts could hurt your local library. Particularly in rural Washington, those small operations rely on federal grants. Unravel the state library budget and you undermine its ability to secure some of those grants, say Reed and Walsh.

"This would further hamper these libraries at a time when they face their own budget problems while accommodating greater use by their patrons," they wrote.

JEERS ... to Idaho Fish and Game Commission Chairman Wayne Wright of Twin Falls. Consult the public before changing hunting regs? Why bother? Ask the Fish and Game's biologists for their professional guidance? Who needs them?

As the Tribune's Eric Barker reported last week, the commission voted to shorten the chukar and gray partridge hunting season by a couple of weeks and reduce bag limits.

Instead of the third Saturday in September, the season will begin Oct. 1. And the limit goes from eight to six birds per day.

Wright said hunters told him they're worried about a decline in the bird populations and that prompted the commission's decision.

"I think, at least in the Magic Valley, we did go through a scoping hearing," Wright said.

What about the rest of the state? And what's the use of spending all this money on staff biologists, whose business it is to determine whether the hunting season schedule and bag limits have an effect on populations, if you're going to ignore what they say? - M.T.