

# Editorial Steal the needy's crumbs for a rich man's pudding

Marty Trillhaase

Good morning and welcome to the 2012 Marie Antoinette awards.

This year's grand prize winners: Idaho Gov. C. L. (Butch) Otter and House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star.

And while Antoinette may or may not have famously looked down upon the starving masses of French citizens and declared: "Let them eat cake," it is certainly more artful than the two-word retort Otter and Moyle may have in store for Idaho's neediest, its injured and its broken:

Too bad.

Too bad the state went broke a year ago and had to hack away at Medicaid services for Idaho's most vulnerable adults. To save \$35 million in state dollars, Idaho had to sacrifice another \$60 million in matching federal dollars.

Too bad that meant less support for developmentally disabled adults struggling to live and work independently.

Too bad the state would devote less effort to helping the mentally ill maintain their equilibrium and their safety.

Too bad it meant no preventive dental care, vision or audiology services.

For months now, it's been clear Otter and his supporters in the GOP-controlled Legislature went too far. The revenue estimates they low balled against the advice of professional economists inside government and out proved to be wrong. By July, Idaho had enough extra money to restore 40 percent of the Medicaid cuts. By January, it had more than \$100 million in surplus. Since then, the state's revenues have jumped another \$13 million ahead of expectations. Next year, the surplus could be \$140 million.

Until now, you could assume the politicians had been overly cautious.

Now it's clear they had an agenda.

Here's the smoking gun: Moyle, with Otter's backing, wants to cut income taxes for wealthy people and corporations by \$35 million.

That's right: For every state dollar yanked out of the hands of the needy, Moyle plans to hand it over to the affluent.

They'd do that by dropping the top rate on corporations and individuals from 7.6 percent and 7.8 percent, respectively, to 7.4 percent.

So \$30 million of the \$35 million will go to people whose incomes rank them in the top 16 percent in the state.

But, of course, if they pay less in state income taxes, these folks will have fewer deductions on their federal income taxes. By one estimate, 25 percent to 35 percent of what they save in state taxes is headed Uncle Sam's way.

In other words, Idaho's neediest adults will lose almost \$100 million worth of Medicaid services to provide the state's most comfortable citizens with \$25 million in tax relief.

To a person earning \$1 million a year, it's worth a mere \$2,600 extra.

Too bad, say Otter and Moyle, threatening the stability of the mentally ill, forcing developmentally disabled people into institutions and allowing people's teeth to rot away is worth handing \$2,600 to a millionaire if it will get Idaho's economy rolling.

"This starts us down the road of getting the rate down to a level where we can be more competitive," Moyle said.

That's what is in their heads, if not their hearts.

If you didn't know it before, you do now.

So, Gov. Otter and Majority Leader Moyle, congratulations.

Here's your Antoinette award.

You've earned it.

Just don't forget what happened to its namesake. - M.T.