

# Robbing Hood

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JEERS ... to Idaho Sen. Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston. Holding a pivotal vote over Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's \$35.7 million tax break Thursday, Johnson helped send the bill toward final passage.

- Idaho has money because Otter and the politicians manipulated earlier tax revenue forecasts - rejecting what the professional economists told them the state could expect - to justify cutting more deeply than necessary. The state budget is still about 10 percent short of pre-recession levels. Public schools are about \$100 million behind. Higher education may never catch up. Only a sliver of the \$35 million pulled out of Medicaid for Idaho's most vulnerable adults has been restored.
- The money is going to the comfortable. Only the top rate paid by corporations and higher-income individuals and families will drop. So if you're part of Idaho's 82 percent - single earning less than \$36,260, a married couple earning \$72,520 or a couple with two kids who earn \$79,920 - you get zilch.

As Lewiston's solid waste manager, Johnson earns a salary of \$60,850.

- Even the payoff is miniscule. For a family of four making \$100,000, Otter's tax bill nets them \$71.
- Suddenly optimistic about the state's revenue forecast, Otter and company are betting the money will be there to pay for permanent cuts. Retiring House Revenue and Taxation Committee chairman, Dennis Lake, R-Blackfoot, disagrees. He voted no.

JEERS ... to Johnson, again. One of the three northern Idaho lawmakers who voted to force women through an invasive ultrasound prior to getting an abortion, Johnson issued this statement last Friday: "In addition, I would not have voted for the bill if it denied a woman her choice for an abortion. This is a personal choice, a protected choice."

So he's pro-choice?

Then he followed up with a clarification: "As a pro-life legislator, I voted for the bill because it supports the cause of life."

Which is it?

CHEERS ... to Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho. Last fall, Simpson stepped outside the relative safety of the GOP's anti-tax line and essentially embraced the Simpson-Bowles Commission logic: Both politically and fiscally, the only way out of the budget deficit was a package of program cuts, entitlement reforms and revenue increases.

Wednesday, Simpson made good on that pledge and got trounced for his trouble. Only 38 House members supported lowering tax rates but eliminating loopholes to generate about \$1.2 trillion in revenues over 10 years while cutting more than twice that much in spending. Simpson was among them.

Among the 382 who voted no were Reps. Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, and Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash.

That tells you Simpson is serious about balancing the budget. Labrador and McMorris Rodgers remain in denial.

JEERS ... to Senate Majority Leader Bart Davis, R-Idaho Falls. Davis and the GOP leadership team retained Sen. John McGee, R-Caldwell, as caucus chairman despite a bizarre drunken driving episode that McGee never fully explained, only to be embarrassed by McGee's abrupt departure amid sexual harassment charges.

This is the party that gave you Sen. Monty Pearce, R-New Plymouth, who survived an ethics probe because the Senate rules apparently allowed him to conceal his lease agreement with an oil and gas company while he was supporting bills to open Idaho to oil and gas exploration.

This is the team that once pledged to end Idaho's status as one of only nine states without an independent ethics commission or one of only three where elected officials are under no obligation to disclose their finances.

Rather than redeem that pledge, Davis pushed the Senate toward the direction of the House, sealing off public access to how it polices preliminary ethics complaints. Although it will tighten the rules for proper conduct, the Senate's new ethics procedures keep any complaint brought against a senator confidential unless a majority finds cause.

The same policy has empowered House Speaker "Boss" Lawrence Denney, R-Midvale, to look the other way while House State Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Loertscher, R-Iona, buried a bill that might have undermined his abandoned road battle in Bonneville County or how House Transportation Committee Chairman Joe Palmer, R-Meridian, tried to shackle Boise's parking meters near the Capitol after Palmer's son, Ty Palmer, got too many parking tickets.

With Denney and the House, that's expected.

With Hill and the Senate, it's disappointing.

JEERS ... to Sen. Nicole LeFavour, D-Boise. Idaho's only openly gay legislator, LeFavour has championed extending protection under Idaho's Human Rights Act to gays, lesbians and transgender people.

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As a Christmas present, LeFavour distributed DVD copies of "Brokeback Mountain" to 60 lawmakers at their homes. Rep. Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene, took offense .

Imagine returning from a St. Patrick's Day celebration to find a copy of "Clean and Sober" waiting for you.

Or after participating in a Planned Parenthood rally, you discover an audio set of "Rush Limbaugh's Greatest Hits" at your door. LeFavour simply went too far.

CCheers ... to Washington Attorney General Rob McKenna.

The GOP candidate for governor has challenged Democratic candidate and former Congressman Jay Inslee to 15 debates. So far, Inslee has agreed to four, including most recently a June 12 forum at Spokane sponsored by the Association of Washington Business.

Debates are better for voters than candidates - who are forced to make their case outside the comfort of their campaign commercials.

Usually, it's the underdog who pushes debates.

In this case, McKenna is leading Inslee in the polls. - M.T.