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Batt barks back

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Marty Trillhaase |

CHEERS ... to former Idaho Gov. Phil Batt. Batt's predecessor, former Democratic Gov. Cecil Andrus, sounded the alarm about discussions to bring more spent nuclear fuel into the Idaho National Laboratory near Idaho Falls, then leave it there longer.

Batt, a Republican, negotiated, passed and then defended his landmark 1995 settlement agreement - which sets a 2035 deadline for cleaning up wastes and removing them from the state.

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Since the Obama administration played politics with the issue - closing the intended national waste repository at Yucca Mountain, Nev. - those wastes have no place to go. And commercial waste is piling up around the country.

Andrus got his hands on an internal memo that talked about bringing 3,000 metric tons of commercial spent fuel to Idaho and then extending the removal deadline to 2050. INL officials say that memo is obsolete.

But in an op-ed in the Idaho Statesman Thursday, Batt wrote:

- "... [W]e would be foolish, indeed, to renegotiate the agreement and accept commercial spent fuel."
- "The federal government's promises are worthless, so any limitation of amounts would be changed to suit their wishes."
- "The people of the state of Idaho sustained my nuclear waste agreement by a wide margin. Any substantive changes should not be accepted without a similar percentage of Idahoans demanding it."

JEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. Labrador supported the GOP's closed primary election. When Idaho Secretary of State Ben Yursa pointed out the obvious - that more voters stayed home this year because they didn't want to register with a party - he accused the secretary of state of committing "malpractice."

In this context, malpractice is a loaded word. As Idaho's chief elections officer, Yursa is responsible for maintaining the integrity of the franchise. To fling the word malpractice at him implies wrongdoing.

Besides, if anybody has the expertise to interpret voting turnout, it's Ysursa. Before taking office, he worked as a deputy to former Secretary of State Pete Cenarrusa. In nearly 40 years, Ysursa has been straight down the line: Anything that promotes turnout, he's for. Anything that retards it, he's against.

CHEERS ... to Washington Attorney General Rob McKenna and Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden. They are among 22 attorneys general who have backed up Montana's challenge to the U.S. Supreme Court's Citizens United decision opening the spigots of corporate cash into the political campaign.

~~More than most, Montana knows where that can lead. Early in the last century, copper barons literally owned the state. In 1912,~~ Montanans passed the Corrupt Practices Act to restrict corporate involvement. Citizens United put the Montana law at risk, and the question is heading to the federal level.

Neither Washington nor Idaho ban direct corporate contributions to candidates. In Washington, the limit is \$1,800 per election for statewide officers, \$900 per election for legislators. In Idaho, it's \$5,000 per election for statewide posts, \$1,000 for legislative seats.

But each state depends upon its own disclosure laws - and by standing with Montana, McKenna and Wasden are defending your right to know who is bankrolling the people courting your vote.

"What we want to do is ensure that Idaho's regime of campaign finance laws is protected," said Wasden's deputy Brian Kane.

JEERS ... to Ada County Prosecutor Greg Bower. Almost three months ago, GOP Senate Caucus Chairman John McGee, R-Caldwell, stepped down to avoid an ethics probe into allegations that he sexually harassed a female Senate staff member.

Since then, the case has traveled from Wasden's office to the Idaho State Police and then to Bower's agency.

And where is it?

"It's still under advisement, we're still looking into it," Chief Deputy Prosecutor Roger Bourne told the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell.

This is a high-profile case. It's important to judge how well the Senate leadership team handled the McGee affair. How are voters to decide whether to return Republicans to control of the Senate if the McGee case remains "under advisement"?

And what about McGee? He's been left hanging for three months. Now a private citizen, he's entitled to a decision. Either let him get on with his life or allow him to answer charges brought against him.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho. Sometimes Simpson is so blunt, he can make his own staff members uncomfortable. Which was the case this weekend at the annual Wild Idaho conference at Redfish Lake.

In April, Simpson split with Labrador and most House Republicans by voting against an attempt to weaken the Antiquities Act of 1906. Under that measure, presidents have sealed off from development such national treasures as the Grand Canyon and Grand Teton National Park.

The measure Simpson opposed would have required presidents to get state approval before designating a national monument.

Simpson's no fan of the Antiquities Act. But after more than a decade fighting to preserve one of Idaho's jewels - the Boulder-White Cloud range - he's willing to concede the area might need an assist from the White House. The Idaho Republican told his colleagues: "I might have to ask the president to designate the Boulder White Clouds because I can't get a hearing in your committees."

The Idaho Statesman's Rocky Barker reports Simpson's press secretary Nikki Watts winced at that comment. But it tells you Simpson cares more about protecting the Boulder-White Clouds than about who gets credit for doing it. - M.T.

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