

Cheers & Jeers: A great divider

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to presumptive GOP presidential nominee Mitt Romney. To name Idaho schools Superintendent Tom Luna to his Education Policy Advisory Committee suggests Romney either doesn't care about public education or he's totally in the dark about Luna's record.

That record boils down to this: From the time Luna emerged on the scene in 2002, he has been a divisive force in public education.

Whether it's LunaTech - the school chief's attempt to shift resources from classroom teachers into for-profit purveyors of online instruction - charter schools, merit pay or vouchers, Luna has employed wedge issues at every turn.

Members of his own party - from the Land Board to the Legislature - aren't shy about detailing Luna's deceptions and distortions.

Most of the people who have what he lacks - practical, academic and professional experience teaching your children in the classroom - do not trust him.

And on his watch as Idaho's top educator, public schools have lacked an effective, credible advocate at the state level.

Is that what Romney has in mind for public education in the other 49 states?

JEERS ... to Jeff Anderson, administrator of the Idaho State Liquor Division. He's the guy who blocked Five Wives vodka from state liquor store shelves.

His reason: The label of five wives is a joke about polygamy and would offend Mormons.

"The bottom line is, we represent everybody," Anderson says.

So how would any practicing Mormon, who abstains from alcohol, be bothered by a picture of five women on a bottle of boutique vodka?

And why would Idaho Mormons take offense when nobody in Utah seems to care?

Not only is Five Wives a local product - Ogden's Own Distillery makes the vodka - but Utah state liquor stores stock it. So far, customers have snatched up 1,000 cases in six months, says Steve Conlin, a partner and marketing chief for Ogden's Own Distillery.

When was the last time Utah was more open-minded about liquor than Idaho?

Anderson's decision is news everywhere from New York to Seattle and London. It's another black eye for the Gem State.

Thanks, Jeff.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Senate President Brent Hill, R-Rexburg. In an op-ed published in the Idaho Falls Post Register Thursday, Hill didn't mince words: Closing the GOP primary election to registered Republicans drove voters away. Voter turnout is pegged at 23 percent, the lowest ever.

Wrote Hill: "Some believe that Republican domination in Idaho is so strong that the party can afford to offend. Even if they are correct, we should not use our strength to bully our own friends."

Seeking to reopen Idaho's GOP primary puts Hill in league with Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter and Secretary of State Ben Ysursa. But it's Hill who may encounter a leadership challenge in a chamber where the balance of power has shifted toward closed primary backers.

JEERS ... to the members of the NFL Hall of Fame's senior selection committee. It's hard to imagine any group guilty of any greater omission than this: allowing 43 years to pass without inducting Jerry Kramer.

A Sandpoint native and University of Idaho football standout, Kramer was a key component of Green Bay Packers' Coach Vince Lombardi's mythical teams of the 1960s - winning five NFL championships and the first two Super Bowls.

It's been 45 years since Kramer's key block won the legendary "Ice Bowl" for the Packers over Dallas - and people are still talking about it.

With Dick Schaap, Kramer wrote "Instant Replay," a classic considered among the best sports books ever.

After Kramer's retirement, the NFL observed its 50th anniversary by naming the 50 greatest players. Kramer was on the list. Alone among all the All-Time Team's members, Kramer remains excluded from the Hall of Fame.

So, senior selection committee members, what are you missing here?

Have you ignored the grass-roots effort that is building - quite apart from Kramer, who appears unfazed by all this - in Idaho? Among those working on Kramer's behalf are his daughter, Alicia Kramer, UI President Duane Nellis and Gallatin Public Affairs partner Marc Johnson.

How about Kramer's colleagues? So far, 17 Hall of Famers have spoken up. Here's a sample:

- Alex Karras - "Jerry Kramer is one player that should never be forgotten. ... Don't pass him up for the Pro Football Hall of Fame just because he played with so many of the greats."
- Frank Gifford - "Jerry Kramer belongs in the Hall of Fame and, quite frankly, I thought he had already been inducted."

CHEERS ... to Lewiston's own David Leroy. Aside from serving as Idaho attorney general and lieutenant governor in the 1970s and 1980s, the Boise-based lawyer is a first-rate student of the 16th president of the United States.

Leroy has documented the strong connection between Abraham Lincoln and the state of Idaho.

It was Lincoln who created the Idaho territory in 1863, the same year he signed the Emancipation Proclamation, the Pacific Railway Act (establishing the Union Pacific) and delivered the Gettysburg Address.

The fascination has led Leroy on a quarter-century quest for Lincoln memorabilia, creating one of the strongest collections in the Northwest. Included are life masks of the president, a 1,500-volume library and even a lock of Lincoln's hair.

Leroy and his wife, Nancy, are donating this priceless collection to their fellow citizens as Idaho begins to mark the 150th anniversary of the territory. It will go on display at the Idaho State Archives in Boise. - M.T.