

Too little, too late

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter. Out of time to form its own health insurance exchange under Obamacare, Idaho is about to come under the jurisdiction of the feds.

For that, you can thank Idaho's 32nd chief executive.

Tuesday Robert Mitchell, a Denver-based consultant with KPMG LLC, told Otter's health exchange task force the game was over. In order to form a state-based exchange, Idaho would have to submit its blueprint by Nov. 16.

The state isn't even close.

A portal from which individuals and small businesses can select policies, these exchanges also serve low-income adults who qualify for federal health insurance subsidies.

So what does that mean to you?

To get customer service, you won't call the Idaho Department of Insurance. You'll contact a regional office of the American Health Benefits Exchange.

If you get insurance through the exchange, you'll probably pay more. Because Idahoans use health care less than average, their policies tend to cost about \$1,000 less. A national exchange will set national rates.

If you work for an Idaho-based insurance carrier, your job could be at risk. State carriers may find it difficult to compete against larger, national firms.

And if you are a health care provider - or work for one - get ready to rumble as you navigate working with national health insurance carriers.

Otter knew better. More than a year ago, the governor applied for \$30 million in federal money to set up Idaho's own exchange rather than submit to what he called "a one-size-fits-all solution that may not be suitable or even workable for Idaho."

But in the face of Republican legislative resistance, Otter wouldn't fight.

Nearly a year was lost and now it's too late.

CHEERS ... to Clint Hoiland and Ken Sundvik of Clarkston. They've put a human face on what could be an abstract issue.

Marriage equality is on the Washington ballot. Opponents want to repeal the same-sex marriage law passed by Washington's Legislature and signed by Gov. Chris Gregoire.

Voting on Referendum 74 based on a caricature or a celebrity would be one thing.

It's something else when your nephew, neighbor, colleague or employer is openly gay. Then it becomes a matter of people first, politics second. In fact, the dramatic swing toward acceptance of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community - 54 percent of Americans accept homosexuality - reflects the growing familiarity among straights and gays.

Which is why it matters when the Clarkston couple and fathers of two boys opened their home to a profile in Sunday's Tribune.

They shared their 16-year history, their decision to adopt Shane and Joey, their aspirations to marry and their choice to leave Idaho when it banned same-sex marriage in the state Constitution.

In a community where the majority of the gay population chooses to remain private, taking a higher profile is not easy or even pleasant.

"If you don't stand up for your family, who will?" asks Hoiland. "You can't live your life in fear. I have to believe us raising a regular family is something of value."

JEERS ... to Idaho Republican Party Chairman Barry Peterson. Here's the leader of Idaho's ethically challenged majority party wagging his finger at state Rep. Brian Cronin, D-Boise.

To be sure, Cronin has a problem. Until his term formally ends at the end of the year, he has two masters - his constituents and the lobbying firm, Strategies 360, that hired him. As he campaigns against the Luna laws, that convergence leaves him open to criticism.

But Peterson takes it too far, hyperbolically accusing Cronin of violating House ethics rules.

That's a fabrication. Cronin has broken no law or rule. He's simply shown poor judgment.

Besides, where was this full-throated concern for ethical behavior before?

When was the last time you heard Peterson express contrition about the shenanigans of tax scofflaw Rep. Phil Hart, R-Athol?

Or House Speaker (Boss) Lawrence Denney, R-Midvale?

Or former state Sen. John McGee, R-Caldwell?

Or former State Tax Commission Chairman Royce Chigbrow?

Or state Sen. Monty Pearce, R-New Plymouth?

And have you heard Peterson say Idaho's ethics in government laws need improvement?

Didn't think so.

CHEERS ... to Dennis Redmon. As Washington State Wire's Erik Smith reported, Redmon, a 29-year veteran of the Department of Revenue, says the agency looked the other way while a politically connected big wheel avoided a \$2 million tax bill. The unidentified individual purchased an aircraft in another state and was obligated to pay Washington sales tax. Because the agency deliberately waited too long to collect it, Redmon says, the statute of limitations ran out and no bill was due.

The case is under investigation. But filing a complaint - and then alerting the public about it - takes nerve. He's putting himself in jeopardy.

"Somebody has got to be willing to step forward and take a beating over it," Redmon said.

CHEERS ... to the Idaho Supreme Court. First it told scofflaw Hart to pay the \$53,000 in back taxes he owes the state. That says nothing of the nearly \$500,000 Hart owes the feds.

Next, the Supreme Court said he wasn't entitled to preferential treatment.

Now it has told him to cough up another \$10,000 for wasting everybody's time with such a frivolous claim. The attorney general's office sought the payment to cover what it cost to take Hart into court.

Just one question for the Idaho justices:

What makes you think he's going to pay? - M.T.