

Pitchfork time

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Latah County Commissioners Jennifer Barrett and Tom Stroschein When elected politicians take it upon themselves to prohibit who can challenge them for office it's time for the pitchforks and torches.

Say Barrett and Stroschein, it would be a swell idea if people employed in the courthouse just do their work and shut up. If they want to challenge the person at the top at election time, let them quit first.

To his credit, Commissioner Dave McGraw opposes the idea.

Barrett and Stroschein say it's about preventing lawsuits and a hostile work environment.

It's not.

They say they're doing this with the encouragement of the Idaho Counties Risk Management Program.

Hardly.

Strip away all the rhetoric and it comes down to this: The top dogs want to retain their posts.

Anyone who is forced to choose between keeping his job or running for office is likely to stay put. But who's more qualified to take on a sitting sheriff than one of his deputies? Who's more likely to persuade voters to oust an assessor, treasurer or clerk than a senior staffer who knows the ropes?

Take those potential candidates out of the mix and voters will have fewer choices.

Rather undemocratic, don't you think?

JEERS ... to LeeAnn Callear of Ahsahka. The GOP's north central Idaho regional chairwoman and a member of the state Republican Party's executive committee, Callear has influence over the direction of Idaho's dominant party. So consider the string of homophobic slurs that appeared on Callear's Facebook page. On Dec. 7, she linked to a KTVB television story about the Mormon church encouraging compassion for gays.

"SICK!" she wrote. "I think there should be more compassion for all, but why specify homos, why even bring it up? Of course, we are to love all. When will the Mormon church come out and announce some compassion for adulterers?"

That triggered comments from friends who follow her page, including one who ridiculed the idea of more compassion for "rapists, child molesters, bestiality and drug addicts. After all, they were born with the weakness like homosexuality (if you buy into that claim.)"

Responded Callear: "Pedophiles were born 'that way' too."

The Tribune emailed Callear but got no response.

And you wonder why the Republican Party enjoys the reputation it has today?

CHEERS ... to 4th District Judge Darla Williamson. It has been nearly 20 months since Nez Perce County Commissioner Michael Grow was arrested and charged with sexually assaulting a woman near Donnelly.

Twenty months of court hearings, negotiations and mysterious legal machinations concerning a high-profile elected official.

Twenty months of politics - including a re-election campaign Grow ultimately lost.

Twenty months of a case taking on a life of its own.

So it seemed last week when it was announced Grow's trial date had been vacated.

Monday, Grow, his attorney, James Siebe of Moscow, and Valley County Prosecutor Matthew Williams walked into Williamson's courtroom and asked for another delay to outline a plea bargain.

Nothing doing, Williamson said.

Make the deal Monday and enter the plea, she said.

That's only fair.

Delays disrupt the lives of prospective jurors, make more work for court staff and frustrate a public seeking closure.

Thanks to Williamson, the case finally ended. Grow pleaded guilty to three misdemeanors - unlawful entry, stalking and battery. He'll serve 90 days in jail - with credit for two days served - undergo inpatient alcohol treatment and spend four years on supervised probation.

JEERS ... to Sen. Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene. If anybody deserved a public flogging as he entered Idaho's upper legislative chamber, it was Nonini.

In the eight years he inhabited the House, Nonini embodied its worst traits - arrogance, rigid ideology and factionalism.

In a stunning display of chutzpah, Nonini decided he knew best who should join him in the Senate. Through his political action committee, Nonini funneled cash into the campaigns of right-wing primary challengers to Sen. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint, Sen. Dean Cameron, R-Rupert, and Sen. John Tippetts, R-Bennington.

All three survived.

So a trip to the woodshed was expected. But Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill, R-Rexburg, and Majority Leader Bart Davis, R-Idaho Falls, were more forgiving. Instead of sweeping the floors of the Capitol basement for the next two years, Nonini will be spending his time on three committees - Agricultural Affairs, Education and Transportation.

The Great Nonini lives on.

CHEERS ... to former Idaho Gov. Cecil D. Andrus. Earlier this week, he pointed out former Idaho Sen. Frank Church's singular contribution to compassionate end-of-life care in this country. Prompting Andrus' recollection was the death of former Idaho Supreme Court Justice Byron Johnson.

"I noticed a news story mentioned a hospice service was present, ..." Andrus wrote. "It reminded me that few Idahoans know that they and millions of their fellow citizens have the late Sen. Frank Church to thank for fighting for eight years and finally succeeding in 1982 (two years after he left the Senate) in getting hospice service costs covered by Medicare."

The precedent extended to Medicaid and private insurance. Hospice quickly spread beyond its beachhead on the East Coast. Not a year after Church's program passed, for example, hospice programs began at Lewiston and Clarkston.

"Sooner or later, every family will become aware of hospice as a relative or friend that is dying will choose to seek a hospice agency to provide palliative care and support to a dying loved one," Andrus said. "Remember to thank Frank Church." - M.T.