

# Turf building

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to Latah County Sheriff Wayne Rausch. For him, turf comes first. Rausch is a solitary holdout from Whitcom, which handles public safety calls for Moscow, Pullman, Washington State University, Whitman County, Asotin County and Clarkston.

What would Latah County citizens gain by signing up with Whitcom? After paying Matrix Point Inc., \$10,000 to look into it, here's what Latah County commissioners learned: The merger may not save taxpayers any money. But it would deliver better service.

"Improved technology and process consistency by using Whitcom should over time raise the level of emergency dispatch service to residents of Latah County," the consultants found.

Rausch doesn't want to disrupt his operation or staff. The common interest is no match to one obstinate sheriff's self interest. The county commissioners dropped the idea.

CHEERS ... to Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, both R-Idaho. With their support, the Senate Monday voted 74-to-20 to consider enabling states to collect sales taxes due on transactions made over the Internet.

That's a break in a logjam that has bedeviled Idaho, Washington and any state that imposes a sales tax.

Idaho loses \$35 million a year. For Washington, at least \$184 million goes unpaid.

As the share of the economy conducted online continues to expand, those numbers can only rise.

It's hardly fair to the brick-and-mortar retailers who invest and hire locally. Collecting the sales tax makes their goods more expensive than the products their online competitors offer tax-free.

All that stands in the way is politics. None other than Americans for Tax Reform President Grover Norquist is mislabeling this as a new tax. It's not. But for any Republican, saying no to Grover is always dicey.

JEERS ... to Tim Eyman. Earlier this year, the Washington Supreme Court put the Evergreen State's initiative entrepreneur in his place: There's a limit to his power. If he wants to force every tax bill to win a two-thirds majority in the House and Senate, Eyman must amend the state constitution. Simply passing an initiative to that effect won't cut it.

For Eyman, desperate times require desperate measures. Now headed to a ballot near you is his latest end run around the constitution:

- Every tax increase will have a shelf life of one year. After that, lawmakers must renew it. No matter that Washington budgets on a biennial basis or that sunseting tax laws would throw state government into dysfunction. No matter that states don't put one-year sunsets on criminal codes or appropriation bills.
- Every time a lawmaker votes for a tax bill, it will be recorded next to his photo in the state's voter pamphlets. In other words, Eyman wants to spend your tax dollars on campaign ads.
- Every year, your ballot will be cluttered with Eyman's advisory measure, asking support for a constitutional amendment to require a two-thirds vote to pass tax increases.

Odds are this latest ploy is just as unconstitutional as Eyman's earlier schemes. It's a waste of your time and money.

Not that Eyman cares. Running initiative campaigns is how he pays his bills.

This keeps him in the chips.

JEERS ... to Pocatello Mayor Brian Blad. Alone among the growing chorus of Idaho city leaders who championed civil rights for all citizens, Blad lost his nerve.

Pocatello was the fifth Idaho city to consider an ordinance banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. Pioneering that effort have been Sandpoint, Boise, Ketchum and Moscow - and now Coeur d'Alene is pursuing its own ordinance. Cities are safeguarding the rights of their citizens because the Legislature won't.

At the last minute Blad and the Pocatello City Council met privately with the right-wing Ethics in Public Policy Center.

And when the vote came last week, Pocatello's six-member council deadlocked, leaving Blad to break the tie.

On a matter of conscience, Blad chose to err on the side of political expediency. He voted no and promised a watered-down version.

CHEERS ... to Idaho Transportation Director Brian Ness. Contrast Blad's timidity to how Ness' agency righted a wrong.

To change the sex designation on a driver's license, ITD required transgender people to provide a signed surgeon's note stating the person had "undergone a complete surgical change of gender."

Few transgender men and women have that surgery.

Not only was ITD interfering with the medical decisions of patients and doctors, it was invading people's privacy.

When the American Civil Liberties Union raised those concerns, however, ITD promptly amended its policy - allowing transgender people to alter a license by submitting a court order or a doctor's statement.

CHEERS ... to Lynn Hoffman of Boise. Executive director of the Idaho Nonprofit Center, Hoffman is promoting the May 2 Idaho Gives campaign. The 24-hour fundraising drive highlights the role of nonprofits throughout Idaho.

More than 3,800 people throughout north central Idaho work at nonprofits. Among regional nonprofits participating in Idaho Gives are:

- Palouse Humane Society.
- Latah Trail Association.
- Lewiston Civic Theatre.
- Lewiston Library Foundation.
- Northwest Children's Home.
- Palouse Clearwater Environmental Institute. - M.T.