

# Taking hostages

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to U.S. Sen. Jim Risch and Congressman Raul Labrador, both R-Idaho. The latest D.C. twaddle has Republicans threatening to shut down the federal government to force an Obamacare repeal.

Risch is among 11 GOP senators who have signed Utah Republican Mike Lee's threat.

Labrador is among 66 Republicans who have endorsed a similar effort in the House from North Carolina Congressman Mark Meadows.

Whatever Risch and Labrador are up to here, it's entirely self-serving: Playing to the GOP's fringe is a certain winner in the all-important closed primary.

Risch and Labrador are betting President Obama and the Democratic Senate so fear a shutdown that they'll defund Obamacare.

Of course, you're the hostages. While they sit comfortably in their congressional offices, workers at federal installations throughout Idaho - the Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, Idaho National Laboratory and others - will be sent home.

If you're planning on visiting a national park, need a permit or have business pending with a federal agency, you'll be out of luck.

Like it or loathe it, Obamacare is settled. Congress passed it. The Supreme Court upheld it. And the voters rejected Mitt Romney, who pledged to repeal it.

Five Republican senators - Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire, John Boozman of Arkansas, John Cornyn of Texas, Mike Kirk of Illinois and Roger Wicker of Mississippi - dropped out of Lee's contingent.

No less a budget hawk than Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., says, "It's not an achievable strategy ... and it's dishonest."

Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., calls it, "The dumbest idea I've ever heard of."

Consider who's not on the list: Congresswoman Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., Congressman Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, and Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho.

These Capitol Hill veterans know folly when they see it. All of which makes one wonder if Risch and Labrador are still figuring out where the Capitol Hill bathrooms are.

JEERS ... to Idaho Transportation Director Brian Ness. Why would Omega Morgan bring two megaloads to the Port of Wilma when the U.S. Forest Service has sealed shut U.S. Highway 12, the intended route toward the Alberta tar sands? Judging from the actions of Ness' agency, it could be that Omega Morgan is listening to the Idaho Transportation Department.

No, ITD hasn't issued Omega Morgan a permit to proceed. But it appears to be leaning on Clearwater-Nez Perce National Forest Supervisor Rick Brazell.

Omega Morgan and ITD have been stopped cold by U.S. District Judge B. Lynn Winmill's ruling in February that the highway falls under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968. The Middle Fork of the Clearwater and Lochsa rivers were among the first seven waterways designated by that 1968 legislation.

That means Brazell has the last word.

In response to ITD entreaties, Brazell altered his criteria for evaluating megaloads. But it's a distinction without a difference. Until he consults with the Nez Perce Tribe and prepares a corridor management plan - a process that could take years and require resources the Forest Service does not have - no shipment is going down that highway.

And in his response to ITD Chief Deputy Scott Stokes, Brazell wrote: "You mentioned in our meeting in Grange-

ville that the state may issue the permits and then send the shipper to the Forest Service to obtain permission. You are aware the Forest Service has no mechanism to issue a permit for such uses and the concept is disingenuous to the federal court ruling putting the Forest Service in a review role, not a permitting role."

CHEERS ... to Asotin County Commission Chairman Brian Shinn. He's the ramrod behind a plan that could finally rescue the Asotin County Family Aquatic Center from its financial problems.

A newly created public facilities district will ask voters this fall to add a 0.2 percent sales tax surcharge - taking the sales tax from 7.5 percent to 7.7 percent - to generate about \$475,000 for the pool and water recreation park.

Without that infusion, the aquatic center will remain on reduced hours and continue hoping that the decade-old facility's expensive pumps, motors and filters don't wear out before there's money to replace them.

Of course, it wouldn't be necessary if the city of Clarkston had not diverted the lion's share of a 0.3 percent surcharge voters already approved to support the center. Instead, Clarkston officials have allocated these dollars toward such things as a redundant ambulance service.

JEERS ... to Port of Lewiston Manager David Doeringsfeld. There's a reason why the Army Corps of Engineers limits all work in the Snake River to the July 1-Sept. 30 corridor. That's when it has the least effect on migrating fish.

Yet here comes the port, discharging 600 cubic yards of fill during June.

What does Doeringsfeld say? He had a schedule to keep. The port is building a \$2.9 million dock expansion and it needed a pad in place for the construction crane.

"We needed to begin installation of the sheet piles starting July 1, and to be able to meet that time frame, the crane pad needed to be installed to provide a safe working environment," he said. "I think it was just an oversight that the material was entering the river."

The port faces a maximum fine of \$32,500.

JEERS ... to Whitman County Elections Supervisor Debbie Hooper. At least 15 Pullman residents failed to get ballots for next week's primary election. The same thing apparently happened some time back in Oakesdale.

In a low-profile election - Secretary of State Kim Wyman says turnout will be about 30 percent - that's unacceptable.

And yet Hooper either blames the post office or minimizes the problem. "It's only been 15 people so far," she told the Tribune's William L. Spence.

Do those 15 people feel the same way? - M.T.