

# Take a seat in the back, Barry and Jim

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Barry Peterson, the man at the helm of the Idaho Republican Party, needs to go back to school.

For that matter, so does Idaho County Commissioner Jim Chmelik.

How else can you explain both men - and the organizations they influence - getting behind the idea the federal government should hand over millions of acres to the state of Idaho?

In June, the GOP central committee, over which Chairman Peterson presides, backed the transfer.

In September, Chmelik persuaded two-thirds of the Idaho Association of Counties to pass a resolution supporting the Legislature's stance in favor of the land trade. However, county leaders want assurances the payment in lieu of taxes their federal landlords provide would be continued under state ownership.

"Our party has spoken" Peterson said. "Our counties' elected officials have spoken. Now, we ask the leaders of Idaho to speak. Speak for the funding of our schools, funding of county governments and the opportunity of job creation."

OK fellas. Before you go any further, sign up for the following curriculum:

- Economics 201 - Idaho can't afford it. Commissioned by Congressman Mike Simpson, a Congressional Research Service study concluded taking over assets now managed by the Forest Service, Fish and Wildlife Service and the Bureau of Land Management would cost Idaho \$392 million. The price may be closer to \$500 million when you factor in firefighting bills not covered by the study.
- Civics 025 (remedial) - To become law, a bill must pass the House of Representatives, the Senate and then get signed by the president. When Republicans controlled both houses of Congress and the White House under George W. Bush, they could not even manage mild changes in the environmental laws. What makes you think a Democratic Senate and the Obama administration would go along with something even more controversial - giving away these national assets?
- Western history 102 - The Sagebrush Rebellion erupted in response to the 1976 passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. That sealed the door on transferring BLM acres back to the states. People got angry.

No such grass-roots rebellion is stirring up things now. The Idaho Legislature's public lands task force is a derivative of the politicians and their ideology, not some pent-up frustration at the local level.

- Idaho political history 101 - A broad spectrum of Idaho voters frown on federal lands transfers. They fear the property will be sold off to the highest bidder. The last Idaho politician who flirted with the idea was Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter, whose 2006 Democratic opponent Jerry Brady threw him back on his heels with an "Idaho is not for sale" campaign.
- Business 301 - Idaho makes more money leaving the trees standing. Says the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation generates \$6.3 billion to Idaho's economy - three times what logging produced in a boom year.
- Governance 402 - Government closest to the people governs best. It's true. While Congress is stymied in dysfunction, ordinary Idahoans have embraced the idea of working out resource disputes themselves. Case in point: The Clearwater Basin Collaborative's blueprint to expand logging on the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest by 50 percent while adding 300,000 acres of wilderness and placing seven streams in the Wild and Scenic Rivers system.

That's a full slate of classes. But Peterson and Chmelik seem to have a lot to learn. - M.T.