

# What is Hill waiting for? Appoint Keough

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

Ever since veteran Sen. Dean Cameron, R-Rupert, announced his departure to become Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's Department of Insurance director, there's been considerable scuttlebutt about who would succeed him as co-chairman of the legislative budget committee.

That panel is comprised of both House and Senate members and is officially known as the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee.

And yet the choice for chairwoman on the Senate side is an obvious one - Sen. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint.

She's qualified by experience, seniority and temperament. Now in her 10th term, that makes Keough not only the most senior senator on the budget committee but also the longest-serving woman senator in Idaho history.

But she also carries with her the aspirations of those who are underrepresented in the state Capitol.

- Were she selected to succeed Cameron, Keough would join her House counterpart, Rep. Maxine Bell, R-Jerome, as a co-chairwoman. Having women in both leadership slots of the Legislature's most-powerful committee would be a milestone, but it would also be an oasis in a leadership desert.

No woman serves in any GOP leadership role in the House or Senate.

All but one of Idaho's statewide officers are men.

The entire congressional delegation is held by men.

- Northern Idahoans for another.

Aside from Rep. Vito Barbieri, R-Dalton Gardens, chairman of the House Business Committee, no lawmaker north of Canyon County wields a gavel, sits in GOP legislative leadership, holds statewide office or is part of the congressional delegation.

Given the region's lack of legislative seniority and its tendency to send a few Democrats to Boise, that's not likely to change.

- Moderates for a third.

Keough is part of a vanishing breed in Idaho's Panhandle, a reasonable, results-oriented Republican. Thanks largely to House Speaker Scott Bedke's appointments, the political center

holds the balance of power on the joint budget committee. Crucial to retaining that governing coalition is placing Keough at the top.

Yet, Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill, R-Rexburg, says he hasn't made up his mind. Although he has named Keough interim co-chairwoman, he's holding off making a final decision.

"We'll wait until closer in the legislative session to actually appoint a replacement for Dean," Hill told the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell.

Why?

It can't be about experience. Keough joined the committee in 2001. She has served as vice-chairman to Cameron on the budget panel since 2005 - a trial by fire when the Great Recession ravaged state revenues and made budget-writing a nightmare.

"We've been through a lot of tough times," Cameron told Russell on his way out the door. Keough "hasn't sought the limelight or been out in front much, but that doesn't mean she wasn't doing the work. She certainly was."

Every one of the legislators Hill has assigned to run a committee is junior to Keough. In part, that's because she elected to remain on the budget panel - which precluded taking a chairmanship. Of course, the minute the rule got in the way of allowing her fellow budget panel member, four-term Sen. Dean Mortimer, R-Idaho Falls, to take the helm at Education, the rule changed.

Compare her tenure with:

- Agriculture Committee Chairman Jim Rice (three terms).
- Outgoing Commerce Chairman John Tippetts (three terms).
- Health and Welfare Chairman Lee Heider (three terms).
- Judiciary and Rules Chairwoman Patti Anne Lodge (eight terms).
- Local Government and Taxation Chairman Jeff Siddoway (five terms).
- Resources and Conservation Chairman Steve Bair (five terms).
- State Affairs Chairman Curt McKenzie (seven terms).
- Transportation Committee Chairman Bert Brackett (five terms).

If Hill has a good reason for holding up this appointment, let's hear it. - M.T.