

Odd couple

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to U.S. Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, both D-Wash.

Nobody's particularly surprised to see conservatives, such as Idaho Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, currying favor with the nation's pharmaceutical industry. But why would two progressives join them?

Last week, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., ran an amendment to allow individuals, pharmacists and warehouses to legally import prescription drugs from other countries.

It was a symbolic, non-binding measure - but it points to the ability of U.S. drug makers to impose their will on American consumers.

According to Sanders' office, Canadians will pay \$212 for the same Celebrex prescription that costs \$895 in the U.S. Buy Crestor in Canada and you'll pay \$160; in the U.S., it will cost \$730.

Although Crapo and Risch voted no, Sanders actually had support from 13 Republicans - including John McCain of Arizona, Rand Paul of Kentucky, Ted Cruz of Texas and Susan Collins of Maine.

But when Murray, Cantwell and 11 other Democrats deserted him, Sanders' plan went down to defeat.

Say the two Washington Democrats: It was about preserving drug safety and quality. No one will argue with that; not even the consumer-advocacy group Public Citizen.

You could also call it a convenient posture for any politician who wants to maintain cordial ties with a powerful lobby and its campaign treasury.

For instance, the Center for Responsive Politics' Opensecrets.org reports Murray has accepted \$1.143 million in contributions from pharmaceutical companies throughout her career. Crapo is not too far behind; he's taken \$782,672.

Cantwell received \$170,625 and Risch has accepted \$48,000.

JEERS ... to state Rep. Priscilla Giddings, R-White Bird. Wasn't she supposed to be the rational conservative alternative to former Rep. Shannon McMillan, R-Silverton?

Yet here was Giddings on Monday joining four hard-liners such as Rep. Ron Nate, R-Rexburg, in an apparent show of solidarity with defrocked state Rep. Heather Scott, R-Blanchard.

After Scott accused leadership of trading sexual favors for choice committee assignments, House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, stripped away her committee assignments.

Well, five more can play that game: Take away our committee assignments, too, they dared the speaker.

Giddings told the Tribune's William L. Spence she was summoned to a closed-door meeting with Scott, Bedke and House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star, and she didn't like what she saw.

But who would it hurt if Bedke reciprocated?

Remove Giddings from the State Affairs Committee and she'd have no voice about any bill to impose more strenuous background checks on gun purchases.

Dropped from the Resources and Conservation Committee, Giddings could do virtually nothing about Fish and Game policy.

Ousting Giddings from Local Government would deprive her of any real influence over urban renewal reforms.

She'd be left holding her breath, waiting to turn blue.

CHEERS ... to Bedke. Credit the speaker for looking after Giddings' constituents by not granting her appeal.

"I don't think I'll be acting on those requests soon," he told the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell.

If the five legislative protesters wanted to boycott their committee assignments, that was up to them. But their actions represented no affront to him, the House leadership or the decorum of the chamber.

"We have the people's business to conduct here, and that's what we should be doing," Bedke said.

Bedke, of course, is holding all the cards. He could quickly disabuse Giddings of her naive notion that no chain of command exists in the Legislature.

A more thin-skinned, vindictive leader might have toyed with the idea.

Instead, Bedke displayed his mature temperament. He sent the legislative youngsters on their way - back to their committee meetings.

CHEERS ... to Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, Attorney General Bob Ferguson and former Attorney General - and Inslee's 2012 GOP gubernatorial rival - Rob McKenna.

Together, they're calling on Washington to become the 20th state to abolish the death penalty.

Since 2014, the state has operated under Inslee's personal moratorium on executions. But the capital punishment machinery is ready to be cranked up on a moment's notice.

Why let that happen?

You can't say Washington's system is fair. If Green River Killer Gary Leon Ridgway - who was convicted of 48 murders and confessed to nearly twice as many - doesn't rate the death penalty, who does?

You can't say it's foolproof. Twenty years ago, Benjamin Harris was exonerated 12 years after he was sentenced to death.

You can't say it's cheap. Two years ago, Seattle University criminal justice professor Peter Collins demonstrated the average death penalty case trial cost \$1 million more than a murder case in which capital punishment was not an option.

Last year, the Pew Research Center announced its poll showed national support for capital punishment had dropped to 49 percent.

Inslee is ahead of the people on this issue - but not by much.

CHEERS ... to former Idaho Supreme Court Chief Justice Jim Jones. Since leaving office, Jones - a former Republican attorney general - has called on the state's GOP congressional delegation to educate President Donald Trump in the ways of the Kremlin.

"While Putin may seem to be extending an olive branch," Jones wrote. "I fear that all he wants now is for the new president to lift the sanctions imposed because of the Russian grab of Crimea. That would amount to appeasement, only encouraging Putin to take further action hurtful to U.S. interests."

Not long after, Jones chided the state's faith-healing loophole - which allows parents to withhold medical care from their children on religious grounds.

"Well, I guess it's my observation that a lot of the people who decline to get simple medical care for their children are the same people who say you have to bring a child to full-term birth," Jones told the Idaho Statesman. "And my thought is that if you are forced to do that, shouldn't you be forced to see that once they are part of society, they get the right to live?"

Wednesday in Twin Falls, Jones took after critics of the College of Southern Idaho's refugee resettlement program: "Breitbart News, World Net Daily and others have played fast and loose with the truth and should not be regarded as credible."

How many people of Jones' stature are willing to tweak the state's political and moral conscience? Good for him. - M.T.