

Dancing around

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to state Sen. Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston. At last week's League of Women Voters forum, Johnson danced around answering where he stands on the Luna laws.

The measures, up for a referendum vote Nov. 6, upend collective bargaining, impose merit pay and steer dollars from classroom teachers toward out-of-state, for-profit providers of online instruction.

From the time schools Superintendent Tom Luna blindsided the public with these proposals in 2011, they've been the vortex of contention.

As a private citizen, Johnson signed the initiatives calling for the referendum.

As a newly appointed state senator, he supported changes in the original laws earlier this year.

"In terms of supporting the referendum," Johnson advanced, "I do support two of them and I'm undecided on the third." ...

OK, so which one?

He won't say. The incumbent state senator for Nez Perce County has just told you one of Idaho's major education laws is so badly flawed he may vote to repeal it.

Does he really expect you to guess which one?

CHEERS ... to Idaho Secretary of State Ben Ysursa. One thing you can count on, Ysursa will defend Idaho's Sunshine law against all comers. Passed by the voters nearly four decades ago, the law says candidates and organizations must tell you where they get their money.

Desperate to avoid defeat, backers of the Luna laws are hiding the source of \$200,350. Here's how their shell game works: Parents for Education disclosed collecting that amount from a single source - Education Voters of Idaho.

And where did Education Voters of Idaho get the money?

It refuses to say.

Among the people involved is former state Rep. Debbie Field, R-Boise - who is a political ally of Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter - and John Foster, who ran one-term Democratic Congressman Walt Minnick's shop.

If they get away with this, the Sunshine law will go dark.

"To not do it eviscerates the whole law," Ysursa said. "If they are not covered, then nobody is."

So Ysursa is demanding an answer. Tell Idaho's voters the source of this money by today - or answer to a judge by Monday.

Good for him.

JEERS ... to Yes for Idaho Education. Headed by political operative Ken Burgess, the pro-Luna laws campaign has lifted former National Education Association lawyer Bob Chanin's 2009 farewell address - and then erased four of every five words.

The result: an ad that makes the NEA seem callous beyond belief. Rather than kids and schools, Chanin says it's all about power.

Here's what he said and how Burgess edited the tape. Omitted words are in italics. Retained are words in bold:

"So the bad news, or depending on your point of view, the good news, is that NEA and its affiliates will continue to be attacked by conservative and right-wing groups as long as we continue to be effective advocates for public education, for education employees, and for human and civil rights. And that brings me to my final and most important point. Which is why, at least in my opinion, NEA and its affiliates are such effective advocates. Despite what some among us would like to believe, it is not because of our creative ideas.

"It is not because of the merit of our positions. It is not because we care about children. And it is not because we have a vision of a great public school for every child. NEA and its affiliates are effective advocates because we have power. And we have power because there are more than 3.2 million people who are willing to pay us hundreds of millions of dollars in dues each year because they believe that we are the unions that can most effectively represent them, the unions that can protect their rights and advance their interests as education employees."

What if someone removed 80 percent of the Bible, the Gettysburg Address or the U.S. Constitution?

Not only is Burgess guilty of deception, but he's stealing somebody else's dirty trick. Karl Rove's Crossroads GPS pulled the same stunt a year ago.

JEERS ... to state schools Superintendent Tom Luna. His department wants to probe public reaction to the Luna laws. He's surveying 9,000 parents and 600 teachers and 25 principals across 12 schools. Results are due back today.

Where would you ever get the idea this is a taxpayer-funded attempt to sway support toward passing next month's referendum vote?

Says Luna's mouthpiece, Melissa McGrath: It's merely an attempt to draw out how best to proceed whether the laws are retained or not, she says.

Uh-huh.

If Luna cares so much about what matters to parents and educators, why is he seeking their opinion now - rather than before he pushed his program down their throats?

CHEERS ... to the Lewis Clark Valley Chamber of Commerce. The chamber rarely take sides on an initiative campaign, but it has weighed in against the Taxpayers Against Unfair Taxation-backed measure aimed at tying the city of Lewiston into knots.

"On behalf of the Lewis Clark Valley Chamber of Commerce board of directors, I urge you, the citizens of Lewiston, to vote no on the initiative that prohibits the city of Lewiston from maintaining its current laws and practices in accumulating and handling fees and special taxes," says Chamber President Kristin Kemak.

Up for a vote next month, the initiative attempts to block the city from building reserves and transferring funds from one account to another. That puts the city on the path toward spending and borrowing.

Not merely a neutral third party, the chamber represents a group of businesses often taxed at the highest rate.

On this point, who is more credible? - M.T.