

Idaho's happy hit man claims he is innocent

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

You'll find no more enthusiastic practitioner of the political dark arts than Idaho House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star.

He could have offered "Dracula" author Bram Stoker a few pointers.

Moyle has never been shy about his machinations.

When he sought to hamstring former House GOP Caucus Chairman Ken Roberts, R-Donnelly, in last year's Republican primary election, Moyle didn't sugarcoat it.

"My goal is to make Ken's life miserable because he's making my life miserable," Moyle volunteered.

Moyle's equally glib in his disdain for Attorney General Lawrence Wasden. The AG has a pesky habit of forthrightly telling legislative right-wingers their legislation won't survive a constitutional challenge. So Moyle attempted hiring his own legislative legal counsel to, presumably, tell him what he wanted to hear.

"Quite frankly, we're from the legislative branch, he's (Wasden) from the executive branch, and he tilts toward representing their interests," Moyle said at the time.

Even though they're neighbors, Moyle doesn't mind dissing Democratic-led Boise city hall, either. For instance, he withdrew his support for a constitutional amendment aimed at easing bonding authority for local governments, and blamed Boise's elected officials for the flip-flop.

"The problem I have with this one, you give them a new tool for their toolbox, and before they're even given it, they abuse the privilege," he said.

Moyle almost delights in his bad-boy image. But when the unrepentant sinner pleads innocence, what are we to think?

Case in point: Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's veto of a bill expanding Wasden's responsibility into anti-corruption investigations and prosecutions.

Wasden asked for the veto after the House withdrew a separate bill providing \$213,000 for the new operation. Cash-strapped since the recession began, Wasden said his office couldn't afford to take on new duties.

All signs pointed to Moyle as the culprit.

The co-chairwoman of the Legislature's budget committee, Rep. Maxine Bell, R-Jerome, told the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell that Moyle ordered the funding bill spiked at the last minute.

"He said they (attorney general's office) didn't need it," Bell said.

For his part, Moyle reiterated the funding was not required.

After that, as the Idaho Statesman's Dan Popkey noted, this page and the editorial page of the Idaho Falls Post Register "pounced" on Moyle.

"I wasn't the bad guy," he told Popkey. "I'm getting blamed for something I didn't do."

Popkey reported others worked to pull the bill, including Reps. Darrell Bolz, R-Caldwell, and Gayle Batt, R-Wilder. They argued the amended bill left Wasden with less responsibility and therefore fewer expenses.

"Moyle's clean on this one," Batt told Popkey.

You can't disregard Bell. She's as straight an arrow as they come.

The explanations Bolz and Batt offered don't add up. Even in its current form, the public corruption bill was going to require much more work than Wasden can handle. Since the recession began, Wasden's public corruption unit is down from three lawyers and four investigators to a pair of each. He can't accommodate the conflict-of-interest hot potatoes local prosecutors want him to take now. Last year he turned down 15 cases.

And a loss for the attorney general is a win for Moyle.

Oh, be skeptical if you want.

But here is an honest rogue. Moyle freely admits his past skulduggery. If Idaho's happy hit man says he didn't pull the trigger this time, who are we to say otherwise? - M.T.