

Digging up the bodies in Ron Crane's cemetery

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Nobody knows better than Deborah Silver the hurdle confronting her.

Somehow, the Democratic challenger to state Treasurer Ron Crane must pierce the GOP body armor shielding him from a public backlash.

Crane has remained in office these past 16 years by keeping his head down and relying on his status as a Republican incumbent in a solidly GOP state. As far as anyone can tell, he has never debated any opponent in the statewide public television debates. Twice, he's faced no Democratic opposition at all.

But Silver, a certified public accountant, knows where the bodies are buried - and Crane's record looks like a cemetery:

- During the 2008-2009 financial collapse, Crane lost \$19 million of local government tax dollars on mortgage-backed securities. City and county officials were bound to find out - and Crane faced a potential rebuke from Standard and Poor's.

Instead, Crane concealed it - by using an account he controls to exchange the distressed securities at full face value.

Nobody was the wiser and Crane was re-elected in 2010.

Until earlier this year, when legislative auditors called Crane on it and all but accused him of violating his obligations to the citizens.

- From 2009 to 2011, Crane filled up his gas tank with nearly \$8,000 of tax dollars, arguing he was entitled as an elected official to be compensated for the cost of commuting from Nampa to Boise. Prosecutors looked into it but declined to file charges. Any other state employee would have been reprimanded, if not fired. While Crane - who earns \$101,150 a year - was pumping gas, public school budgets were getting the ax.
- As auditors reported in 2012, Crane lived it up when he traveled to New York City to secure Idaho's bond rating. Crane's aides, legislators and their spouses were squired along the streets of Manhattan in stretch limousines. Because what Crane spent was folded into a contractor's bill, which was then deducted from bonding fees, the cost to taxpayers was obscured.
- Crane funneled \$10,000 from his office budget toward a "Smart Women, Smart Money Conference," hosted by a non-profit organization Crane owned. He acted without legislative authority to spend that money.

"Everyone knows if a Democrat was (the treasurer), he would have been called on this," Silver told the Moscow-Pullman Daily News while she was attending the Democratic state convention.

Doesn't the campaign ad nearly write itself?:

Hi. I'm Deborah Silver. As candidate for state treasurer, I'll make you three promises:

I won't lose \$19 million of your money. I won't spend your money filling my gas tank. And I won't spend your money squiring politicians around New York in stretch limos.

If Ron Crane were your banker, you'd fire him.

Even if Silver ever found the money to create the commercial, odds are she'd never be able to buy the air time. After winning the Democratic primary, Silver has about \$2,447 in her campaign account. Crane reported 10 times as much in his cash balance.

Somehow Silver must find the means to get her message to presumably unsuspecting Idaho voters.

Then she has to hope those voters will shake their lazy habit of voting the party label.

Good luck with that. - M.T.