

Crafty Ron Crane channels Tricky Dick Nixon

Idaho Falls Post Register Editorial Board

Nearly a half century ago, President Richard Nixon wrote the modern playbook for politicians in trouble. With evidence of wrongdoing piling up, accusations flying, friends fleeing and excuses falling flat, Nixon reached deep into his bag of tricks. He denied. He insulted. He obfuscated. He played the victim.

Clearly, Idaho Treasurer Ron Crane is a student of history. For four terms - 16 years - Idahoans have entrusted billions of dollars to Crane. In return for this responsibility, not to mention his \$101,150 salary, Crane has stumbled and bumbled through one misstep after another.

It began when legislative auditors asked Canyon County's prosecutor to investigate Crane's use of a state credit card to purchase nearly \$8,000 in gas. Crane's defense was he saved taxpayers money by not using a state vehicle for his commute to work - though a 1996 law said "the use of state vehicles for personal or other nonofficial business is strictly prohibited."

The Republican prosecutor in Crane's home county filed no charges.

Another audit discovered that travel expenses to New York City, where Crane, lucky legislators and their spouses would gather to secure Idaho's bond rating, had not been logged in the state's accounting system. Also highlighted was this happy troupe's mode of transport around the Big Apple - stretch limos instead of taxi cabs.

Another audit questioned Crane diverting \$10,000 from his annual appropriation to a conference sponsored by his office.

Yet another audit accused Crane of making questionable investment decisions that cost taxpayers millions. Now those same auditors say Crane failed to provide documentation showing his office has conducted a full review of those transactions.

In light of all this, the Lewiston Tribune recently had the temerity to suggest voters might consider his Democratic opponent, CPA Deborah Silver, in November's general election.

Crane's July 14 response was right out of Tricky Dick's playbook.

First he accused the Tribune of making "false accusations." Next Crane tossed out the old biased media charge. He followed with denials, an attempt to discredit "the inexperienced auditor," and concluded by mentioning the "Obama approach of government," which, apparently, means encouraging people to live "on the government dole."

Naturally, Crane's sleight of hand made no mention that all those charges came not from Democrats or the liberal media, but auditors hired by a Republican-dominated Legislature whose House leadership team includes his own son.

But you've got to hand it to Crane. His response was, well, crafty. Avoiding a primary race while every other statewide candidate was forced to fight for his political life was, again, crafty.

We know how Nixon's story ended. Crane's worst-case scenario is much rosier. If voters decide 16 years is enough, Crane would simply slide into a cushy retirement, his monthly check padded by the PERSI Perk, a boondoggle that allows former legislators who attain higher-paying jobs to live large during their golden years.

One imagines Tricky Dick is smiling down on Idaho about now. His playbook has been put to excellent use by Idaho's craftiest public servant.

Tricky Dick and Crafty Crane. We have no doubt a generation of future politicians will profit from their example.