

Help wanted: Idaho GOP hiring, inquire within

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

For a guy who says he wants to avoid making headlines, Idaho Republican Party Chairman Steve Yates managed to do just that last week.

Swinging through Twin Falls, Yates told the Times-News' Nathan Brown he had picked a new finance chairman.

Larry Craig.

Yes, that Larry Craig.

The same Larry Craig who incinerated a 28-year career - first as a representative from the 1st Congressional District and then as U.S. senator - when he got caught in a gay sex sting operation in a Minneapolis airport men's room in 2007.

The same Larry Craig who tried to wiggle off the hook - first by flashing his Senate identification to the undercover airport cop he allegedly solicited and next by claiming he had a "wide stance."

The same Larry Craig who then pleaded guilty to a reduced charge of disturbing the peace and tried to conceal it until a Washington, D.C., newspaper reported the case.

The same Larry Craig who announced his "intent" to step down from office, only to take it back and serve out the remaining 16 months of his term.

The same Larry Craig who burned through more than \$480,000 of money people had given him for a re-election campaign on an ill-fated legal attempt to withdraw his guilty plea.

The same Larry Craig who drags with him 150 words of background verbiage anytime he gets mentioned in the news.

The same Larry Craig who has his own money troubles.

Tuesday, U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson ordered Craig to pay \$242,535, concluding he had violated the law by converting campaign cash to his private use to pay his attorneys. Earlier, those attorneys warned Jackson the former senator can't cover the bill.

Just what you'd want for a finance chairman - a radioactive politician who mishandled campaign cash and now seems unable to raise money for his own needs.

But if that's Yates' criteria - unelectable Republicans with questionable credentials - may we suggest a few others:

- Get out the vote chairman - Why not outgoing state schools Superintendent Tom Luna? Who else has been more successful in motivating Idaho voters to get out and do their civic duty?

Of course, in this case, Idahoans turned out en masse and humiliated Luna in 2012 by repealing his entire slate of school overhaul laws - some by as much as a two-thirds margin. Nothing has so infuriated Idaho voters since Gov. C. Ben Ross tried to pass a sales tax in 1936.

And when it came time to choose a successor, Republican voters nominated the least Luna-like - Mountain Home school administrator Sherri Ybarra, who opposed the Luna laws.

- Communications director - How about former Idaho GOP Senate Caucus Chairman John McGee, R-Caldwell? Before charges that he propositioned a female Senate aide and made other unwanted advances inside his Capitol offices forced his 2012 resignation and a 39-day jail term, McGee famously stonewalled any and all questions about his drunken driving arrest on Father's Day the year before.
- Standards of conduct - How about a regional triumvirate? To monitor ethical behavior in the north, sign up former state Rep. Phil Hart, R-Athol - the tax scofflaw who helped write the tax laws for everyone else until the voters had enough.

In western Idaho, let's hire former Rep. Mark Patterson, R-Boise, who resigned after Ada County Sheriff Gary Raney noticed he'd failed to report his rape-related conviction on a concealed weapons permit application.

And in eastern Idaho, how about signing up former National Committeeman Blake Hall of Idaho Falls, whose departure from politics about five years ago was hastened by his conviction for stalking a former girlfriend.

Come on, Chairman Yates. When it comes to tainted Republicans, you've got a deep bench. As long as you have room for Craig, why stop with him? - M.T.