

# If Ysursa won't stop Denney, who will?

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

As Idaho's next secretary of state - the chief elections officer - Rep. Lawrence (Boss) Denney, R-Midvale, would systematically suppress the votes of independents.

And the only person who may be able to stop him is the current occupant of that office.

Here's the record:

- Monday, while debating his Democratic opponent Holli Woodings before the City Club of Boise, Denney said primaries are not elections, but instead a means of nominating candidates. Everyone in the room got the message: Convert Idaho to a Utah-style caucus system, thereby handing control over the GOP nomination - essentially the real election in a one-party state - to a group of insiders. A year ago, members of the Idaho GOP State Central Committee toyed with the idea.
- In his Idaho Public Television debate with Woodings Tuesday, Denney backpedaled a little. What he meant was the state taxpayer should not pay for a primary that he and his cronies closed to all but card-carrying Republicans. That's true. The problem is Denney's wing of the party lacks the money to pay for a primary. Since the donor wing that could pay for it opposes the closed primary, the GOP would have no choice but to nominate candidates in a private room.
- At that same IPTV debate, Denney opened the door to forcing GOP primary voters to declare their allegiance well in advance of the election. That would block the independent voters, who today are allowed to register as Republicans at the polls.
- Denney also expressed heartburn with the system that allows thousands of Idaho voters to register at the polls on Election Day.
- And, as noted earlier, Denney volunteered in an Idaho Statesman op-ed that he would implement technology to scan "either signatures or fingerprints" to stifle the voter fraud he fears is coming to Idaho.

None of this is new. Denney - and his colleagues - have advocated steps that would discourage the votes of people who disagree with their fringe of the Idaho GOP. They've closed the primary. They tried to neuter the independent Citizen Redistricting Commission. They've even suggested putting the Legislature in charge of electing Idaho's U.S. senators.

You would have expected Denney not to blow that particular dogwhistle until he was safely elected.

But as a practical matter, he probably is.

Denney is the Republican nominee in a Republican state running for a relatively obscure state office.

About the only person who might stop him is Secretary of State Ben Ysursa.

Ysursa hasn't been shy about standing up against Denney. He opposed closing the primary. He defended the redistricting commission. He even forced allies of Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter to disclose who gave them \$200,000 to defend the Luna Laws in the last election.

Ysursa also has walked right up to the line of opposing Denney. He supported Ada County Chief Deputy Phil McGrane over Denney in the primary.

But now that Denney has signaled his intention to undo Ysursa's legacy, how can he not speak up?

By endorsing Woodings, Ysursa likely would encourage county clerks to follow his lead.

He'd also bring along many Republicans who are privately grumbling about Denney. Don't forget, 63 percent of GOP voters picked another candidate in that primary and that GOP lawmakers took the unprecedented step of firing Denney as speaker.

Ysursa's endorsement of Woodings would be impossible to ignore - the political equivalent of a man-bites-dog story that forces casual voters to ask why.

This is asking a great deal of Ysursa. He risks alienating people within his own party. And it could fracture the fragile truce that Republicans hope will hold long enough to re-elect Otter.

But at this point, Ysursa's silence all but seals Denney's election. - M.T.