

# Open wallets

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

JEERS ... to state Sen. Chuck Winder, R-Boise, and state Rep. Lawrence (Boss) Denney, R-Midvale, co-chairmen of the Legislature's Federal Lands Interim Committee. So far, they've spent \$61,000 on legal advice they could have had for free.

Winder and Denney pushed the idea they could obtain 35 million acres of federal lands within Idaho by going to court.

Attorney General Lawrence Wasden's shop disagreed.

"The lesson I took away was that where we saw progress in the past (in terms of land ownership) has been the result of congressional action," Steve Strack, chief of Wasden's natural resources section, told the panel more than a year ago.

Clearly, that was not what Winder and Denney wanted to hear.

So they signed up former Interior Solicitor William Myers of Boise - at \$420 an hour - to help them out.

"Of course, we have been criticized for not using the attorney general," Denney told the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell. "But I'm not sure the attorney general has any attorneys on staff with the time or the experience that Bill Myers has."

Not taking anything away from Myers - who has been practicing law for 33 years - but Strack has 26 years under his belt. And Clive Strong, chief of the attorney general's natural resources division, has 37 years of experience. The American Bar Association just named him government attorney of the year.

Besides, how much legal acumen does it take to realize the property clause of the U.S. Constitution puts the disposal of property at the discretion of Congress? How many years of courtroom experience do you need to understand Idaho's 1890 constitutional declaration that the people "do agree and declare that we forever disclaim all right and title" to the federal lands?

JEERS ... to Boss Denney. Last month, the Idaho GOP nominee to become secretary of state, and therefore guardian of honest elections, published this in the Idaho Statesman: "One of my priorities is to work on measures to enhance the security of the election process, such as new technology that scans either signatures or fingerprints."

Now he's playing the victim.

"I've been in and seen a lot of political wars, and certainly I have received my share of cheap shots by the media," he wrote in a fundraising letter. "The most recent came from my own

stupidity (sic) in a guest editorial. ... My bad. I was talking about the technology but by mentioning fingerprints, now the media says that I want to fingerprint all voters."

Where would anyone get such an idea?

Could it be from the fact that Idaho already scans signatures on voter registration cards? The only guy who mentioned fingerprints was Denney.

Could it be from Denney's hyperpartisan record? Before his own party dumped him as House speaker, Denney helped kick independent voters out of the GOP primary, tried to neuter the independent redistricting commission and single-handedly killed ethics legislation.

Or is it that as secretary of state, Denney could join 22 other states in making it more difficult for independents to vote - something outgoing Secretary of State Ben Ysursa has resisted?

Gee, how stupid (sic) could we be?

JEERS ... to state Treasurer Ron Crane. For a guy who insists he's on top of money matters, he sure came off poorly last week in Moscow.

Crane joined Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter and first lady Lori Otter Sept. 25 to tout the benefits of the state's higher education savings plan, IDEal.

In introducing University of Idaho junior Kim Davenport, Crane could not keep his details straight.

"The first person we are going to ask to talk is Kim Davenport. She, what was it?" The Moscow-Pullman Daily News' Shannon Quinn reported. "She won some award? She was selected as ... oh, we haven't given it to her yet."

Then Crane tried to make a joke:

"Thank you, Kim, and what I haven't told you was that you've won a \$10,000 award from the governor and the first lady."

There was no scholarship.

Ha ha.

Who would think that's funny?

Only a state treasurer whose fumbling of investing in mortgage-backed securities in 2008 and 2009 cost Idaho at least \$10.2 million and possibly another \$17.4 million.

Crane has yet to answer legislative auditors, who want him to go through his records and prove no other such losses occurred.

CHEERS ... to the two candidates vying to succeed outgoing state schools Superintendent Tom Luna - Republican Sherri Ybarra and Democrat Jana Jones.

Both have taken a dim view of Luna for having spread out a lot of cash among his high-ranking lieutenants.

"I would not have done it as the next superintendent of public instruction," Ybarra said last week at a forum at the College of Idaho.

Luna, who spread \$271,000 among 22 top aides - including more than \$10,000 to Deputy Chief of Staff Jason Hancock and more than \$5,000 to Communications Director Melissa McGrath just before they jumped ship - claims this was nothing new.

"Over the past three years, we've distributed \$639,500 utilizing department funds from state and federal salary savings, roughly equivalent to 2 percent of the agency's appropriation per year," Luna wrote in a Sept. 21 Turnabout column in the Tribune.

Well, not exactly. A records request filed with the state controller's office shows Luna's latest batch of bonuses were:

- More expensive. In 2012, he allocated \$191,234. The next year, he distributed almost \$175,700.
- More lavish. The top amount in 2012 was \$5,001. In 2013, 222 of the 268 bonuses were less than \$1,000. In the current year, Luna has issued five bonuses worth almost \$10,000 each, another 13 at almost \$6,500 a piece and one at more than \$5,000.
- Not really bonuses at all. State law limits one-time bonuses to \$2,000. To circumvent that cap, Luna issued temporary merit pay increases spread across several weeks. - M.T.