

Callear's PAC set the rules Otter could play by

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Ahsahka Republican operative LeeAnn Callear fears Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter's new political action committee will lead to mischief.

Where would she get such an idea?

Could it be from her own experience with the Integrity in Government PAC that raised and spent \$150,000 in a bid to defeat Otter and incumbent Republicans during the 2014 GOP primary?

Callear - Region II representative on the Idaho Republican Party Executive Committee - contends her PAC can't replicate Otter's influence. As the sitting chief executive, he has the power of the bully pulpit, the veto and the appointment process.

"I can't give political favors like he can," Callear told the Tribune's William L. Spence. "If Idaho Power wants to give him \$10,000, he can appoint people to the commission that approves power rates. That's cronyism."

But you have to wonder if Callear is nervous about Otter PAC discovering what she and the other members of Integrity in Government PAC already know:

- PACs can take any amount from any source. For instance, Integrity in Government reported that just 14 contributors provided \$123,500. One check was for \$15,000. Six more came in at \$12,000 apiece. There were two \$10,000 checks and three more \$5,000 contributions.

All were received during the period of May 7-13, 2014.

In contrast, Idaho's political candidates operate under limits. State legislators can accept only \$2,000 each election cycle - assuming they run in both primary and general elections - from any single contributor. For statewide candidates, the cap is \$10,000 for the primary and general.

- Who benefits from a PAC? Hard to tell. Although Integrity in Government PAC doled out smaller contributions to Tea Party favorites such as Idaho County Commission Chairman Jim Chmelik, who ran unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor, and former House Speaker Lawrence "Boss" Denney - who won his bid for secretary of state - the bulk of the money went into third parties. About \$60,000, for instance, went to a direct-mail firm out of Idaho Falls, Alpha Graphics.
- A PAC can remain under the radar screen, thanks to Idaho's campaign finance reporting calendar.

In the final Sunshine Law disclosure required on the eve of the May 20, 2014, primary election, Integrity in Government PAC reported contributions of \$19,849.

When the next report was due 30 days after the election, the PAC's bankroll mushroomed to \$145,568 - which, as Spence noted, qualified it as one of the top five endowed independent PACs in the state.

- Allegations of stealthy behavior are swirling around Integrity in Government PAC. Perhaps because Otter and the incumbents prevailed, few paid attention to Integrity PAC's Sunshine report.

One who did, Idaho Falls attorney Steve Taggart, filed a Jan. 19 article for Idaho Politics Weekly suggesting some of the five-figure contributions came from unlikely sources.

For instance, former 2nd Congressional District candidate Chick Heilson of Idaho Falls is credited with a \$12,000 contribution. But when he ran for Congress two years earlier, Heilson filed the requisite federal financial disclosure form showing he had no liquid assets.

Three other contributions came from out-of-state sources who had no previous political involvements in their own states.

Taggart notes a Provo, Utah, bankruptcy attorney - with about three years of practice - found the resources to provide \$17,200 to Idaho's GOP right-wing insurgency - including \$12,000 to Integrity PAC and another \$5,200 to congressional hopeful Bryan Smith, who was challenging incumbent Mike Simpson two years ago.

Another \$10,000 came from a Utah Valley State University student operating a consulting firm out of his parents' home in Orem, Utah.

And a Jackson, Wyo., woman who heads a nonprofit also provided Integrity PAC with \$10,000.

"While suspicious, it is possible that there was a reasonable explanation for these contributions," Taggart wrote. "But none was ever provided in the 2014 primary."

If these contributors are fronts for the real source of money, Idaho's Sunshine Law has been violated - which is a misdemeanor. So why isn't someone - possibly Attorney General Lawrence Wasden - digging into it?

Will Otter PAC play the game by these same rules?

Probably not. But there are no guarantees.

Could that be what has Callear so

rattled? - M.T.