

Callear's political committee deserves scrutiny

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

When Idaho Attorney General Lawrence Wasden launched an investigation into the political action committee headed up by Ashahka Republican operative LeeAnn Callear, he waded into some murky waters.

Earlier this week, Kimberlee Kruesi of The Associated Press learned that Wasden emailed a complaint to Secretary of State Lawrence "Boss" Denney, warning that Integrity in Government PAC may have violated Idaho's campaign finance laws.

Since then, Wasden's office has launched a probe.

Here's what we know: Integrity in Government PAC raised more than \$150,000 to help the GOP's right wing challenge incumbent state officials - such as Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter - in the May 20, 2014, Republican primary election.

In the Sunshine report Integrity in Government filed just prior to the primary, it had raised almost \$20,000 up to that point. But only 5 percent came from individual Idahoans. GOP central committees from Clearwater and Idaho counties kicked in another 19 percent.

The rest came from out of state - and not simply from Washington residents located close to the Idaho border.

Why would people living in Bellevue, Gig Harbor or Federal Way, Wash., care about whether Idaho County Commissioner Jim Chmelik defeated Lt. Gov. Brad Little? Little won.

Why would someone living in Mercer Island or Seattle donate money to a political action committee set up to support Todd Hatfield over State Controller Brandon Woolf? Woolf won.

For that matter, why would a handful of people from places such as Furlong, Pa., Elko, Nev., or Los Olivos, Calif., give a fig over whether Christ Troupis defeated Wasden's re-election bid? Troupis lost.

And what was it about the four-way GOP bid for secretary of state that Denney wound up winning that persuaded people from Clyde Hill, Wis., Cottage Grove, Ore., or Goodyear, Ariz., to send checks to a political action committee headquartered in northern Idaho?

Just after the primary, Integrity in Government PAC treasurer Marge Arnzen of Cottonwood filed another batch of disclosures. Even more questions were raised.

For instance, the PAC picked up \$123,500 from 14 contributors. One check was for \$15,000. Six more came in at \$12,000 apiece. Another two were \$10,000 checks and three more \$5,000 checks arrived.

All of this occurred within a week.

Virtually all of the big checks came from eastern Idaho - or areas in nearby Wyoming and Utah. There is only one check from northern Idaho, and it's for \$500.

Around the time Wasden was notifying Denney of his inquiry, Idaho Falls attorney Steve Taggart filed an article for Idaho Politics Weekly that raised doubts about whether some of the contributors had the wherewithal to write checks so large:

- Former 2nd Congressional District candidate Chick Heilesen was credited with a \$12,000 donation. But that's at odds with the required financial disclosure Heilesen filed when he opposed Congressman Mike Simpson in 2012. At that time, Heilesen said he had no liquid assets.
- A junior Provo, Utah, bankruptcy attorney provided more than \$12,000 to the political action committee and another \$5,200 to other right-wing insurgents.
- Another \$10,000 came from a Utah Valley State University student running his consulting firm from his parents' home in Orem, Utah.
- A Jackson, Wyo., woman credited with a \$10,000 contribution ran a nonprofit.

It's a strange pattern. Here's hoping Wasden gets to the bottom of it. - M.T.