

Silly politicians should not play with matches

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Deep within the murky waters inhabited by conspiratorialists, you will find the likes of Doyle Beck, Bryan Smith and Christ Troupis.

Beck, an Idaho Falls contractor, is the brother of former state Sen. Rod Beck, R-Boise, and the combative chairman of the Bonneville County Republican Party.

Smith, an Idaho Falls lawyer and debt collector, was the conservative Club for Growth's last best hope of taking out 2nd District Congressman Mike Simpson. In the 2014 primary, he fell 18,400 votes short and collected only 38.4 percent. He now serves as the GOP's regional chairman in eastern Idaho.

Troupis is the Eagle lawyer whose lawsuit kicked independent voters out of the Republican primary election - and who collected \$100,000 from the taxpayers in the process. Two years ago, he fell 25,825 votes short of ousting Attorney General Lawrence Wasden in the GOP primary. And last month, he flirted briefly with running for the Idaho Supreme Court.

They contend that a "secret society" is trying to take over the GOP.

Well, in a state where government is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Republican Party, that's certainly a headline.

But where's the proof?

Says this trio of political masterminds: It's right there in a three-page outline titled "The Idaho Prosperity Project." In it, they say, is a \$100,000 plot to recruit, elect and shepherd the precinct captains chosen in each primary election - and who then pick the party's leadership.

As evidence goes, it's thin.

For one thing, \$100,000 is a lot of money and none of it has materialized. For another, the document itself is vanilla. It proposes to "change the balance of power in Idaho politics to favor a stable, constructive majority," and to "target precincts and districts, gather data, define issues and recruit talent."

No specific reference to Beck, Smith, eastern Idaho or even the GOP itself is made.

Nobody has been able to track down this group.

The Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry has its own Idaho Prosperity Project, but it sticks to getting employees involved in politics. IACI's Idaho Prosperity Fund makes campaign contributions.

The next closest thing is the Prosperity Project in Idaho Falls, which works with children who have been victimized by sex trafficking.

Everyone Beck and Smith have accused of being involved in this secret society - among them Idaho GOP Chairman Steve Yates of Idaho Falls, former Sen. Ann Rydalch, R-Idaho Falls, former Rep. Doug Hancey, R-Rexburg, and Ammon City Councilor Sean Coletti - denies it.

Idaho Falls attorney Steve Taggart says the trio got "catfished" - in other words, taken in by a hoax.

You could chalk it up to another round in the Idaho GOP civil wars that included the closed primary fight, the botched 2014 GOP state convention in Moscow or even Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter's new political action committee.

That's how politics work. One group of people tries to get the upper hand over another group. As they say, it ain't beanbag. There are few rules - and one of them certainly is not explaining your strategy to the opposing team.

Beck, Smith and Troupis are free to complain to the public.

They can ask around, build sources and compile facts.

They can use that information to rally support.

Instead, today they will walk into an Idaho Falls courtroom and ask a judge to compel people under penalty of perjury to answer questions about this "secret society."

Any information gleaned from this process then could be used as evidence for a lawsuit.

But that's not how the law works - nor should it.

What kind of precedent would that set?

What kind of a country would it create?

Who would dare stand up to Beck, Smith or Troupis if it meant being brought into a hostile courtroom?

Who would run for public office knowing his opponents - on the flimsiest of claims - could compel him or his lieutenants to start answering a series of rapid-fire questions?

That's where this stops being a political farce about silly people whose over-active sense of drama is matched only by their own sense of self-importance.

They're playing with fire.

If a judge doesn't stop them, it's you who could get burned. - M.T.