

Who's dumb? Who's dumber? Beck or Yates?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Not since Jim Carrey hooked up with Jeff Daniels have we seen a pairing quite like Bonneville County Republican Party Chairman Doyle Beck and state GOP Chairman Steve Yates.

As in, you know, "Dumb and Dumber."

First there's dumb: Beck has accused Yates and several other eastern Idaho Republicans of creating a "secret society" with the aim of ousting him from the local GOP chairmanship. Beck wanted to compel Yates and the others to answer questions under oath about a three-page outline titled "The Idaho Prosperity Project," which talked about raising \$100,800 and spending it to "change the balance of power in Idaho politics to favor a stable, constructive majority."

Had senior 7th District Judge Richard St. Clair last week not wisely blocked those attempts, it would have transformed a law meant to preserve the testimony of gravely ill witnesses into a political weapon and undermined the First Amendment.

So Beck came up with Plan B - releasing a 39-minute videotape he surreptitiously recorded of his Nov. 22 conversation with Yates.

Legal?

Yes.

Creepy?

Definitely.

But how weird is it to have Beck - who accuses other people of engaging in untoward clandestine behavior - going one better in the skulduggery department?

And where's the smoking gun?

Stick with this for 39 minutes and all you wind up with is a water pistol. Throughout their Q&A, Yates sounds like he may know some details of the insurrection against Beck and his supporters.

Then Beck bores in on the key question: "But you're not a part of it."

Yates: "I'm not. I'm not a part of working on any of the precincts."

Not only is there a videotape of that conversation, but someone transcribed a 28-page document so everyone could read and re-read how Yates not only eluded Beck's trap but may have exonerated himself.

All of which guarantees the next time Beck strikes up a conversation with anybody, the room's getting swept for bugs - and Beck's going to get frisked.

Count on it.

Next comes dumber: Republican Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter is fair game for gossip for everyone except the fellow heading up the governor's political party.

Case in point: When Beck refers to rumors that Otter has "dementia or something and he was just trying to turn it over to (Lt. Gov. Brad) Little, but I've not seen that happen, either."

Instead, Yates said the governor is "partially checked out," and that "... if he likes Brad Little, he won't do that. But I don't know. I've seen basically a guy that has put it into a slow gear, let a staff that is not the greatest in the world do more than they're capable of doing. They botch a veto here, botch an issue there, end up in a special session here, other kinds of stuff."

Others may complain about Idaho's GOP-led Legislature or its all-Republican congressional delegation, but the man at the top of the party machinery ought to avoid characterizing the Legislature as "pliant" or the congressional delegation as one that "sometimes hits on some issues we care about."

Last year, just about everybody had something to say about Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry President Alex LeBeau's emailed temper tantrum aimed at Sen. Jeff Siddoway's refusal to consider a tax cut.

But as Idaho GOP chairman, Yates probably needs LeBeau's checkbook more than IACI needs a robust GOP. So why is Yates commenting on it?

"Everything they touch is going to smell like that email. ... I would have thought (LeBeau would) have self respect enough to just leave. We don't pay enough in Idaho. Go to Florida and live out his days."

And you can't swing a dead cat without finding someone who detests the Idaho media, the Tribune's Opinion page in particular. Still, the political operative who came to his post two years ago to smooth over the party's rough edges should not be caught accusing the Idaho State Journal of Pocatello of being an "open mic newspaper for whoever can put words together," or snidely observing how his own hometown newspaper, the Post Register of Idaho Falls, hired a former New Yorker to run its Commentary page.

Why?

Because - dummy - you never know who's taping you.

So goes the Idaho GOP's version of "Dumb and Dumber."

Any ideas when the sequel is coming out? - M.T.

