

# Idaho's Sunshine Law has sprung a leak

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

Idahoans may not like where politicians get their money - but at least under the Idaho Sunshine Law, those politicians have to level with us.

Or so we thought.

Last week, Attorney General Lawrence Wasden alleged a criminal enterprise involving former Republican congressional candidate M.C. "Chick" Heilesen and Bonneville County Republican Chairman Doyle Beck, both of Idaho Falls.

The two men stand accused of laundering Beck's \$12,000 contribution to a right-wing political action committee by passing it off as Heilesen's money.

Because they're charged with knowingly and willfully violating the Sunshine Law, each is facing a misdemeanor conviction, a \$250 fine and a six-month jail sentence.

Until now, the most serious challenge to Idaho's campaign finance law was Education Voters of Idaho's refusal to disclose where it got \$641,000 to defend the Luna laws during the 2012 referendum campaign. But once then-Secretary of State Ben Ysursa prevailed in court, EVI coughed up the names - including \$250,000 from Albertsons heir Joe Scott and \$200,000 from former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Then came the Tea Party-oriented Integrity in Government PAC. In 2014, it targeted Republican incumbents it deemed insufficiently pure including Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter, Lt. Gov. Brad Little and Wasden in that year's GOP primary.

Something did not add up. Just on the eve of the primary election, Integrity in Government raised \$123,500 from just 14 contributors - and most of that money arrived within one week.

When Idaho Falls attorney and political columnist Steve Taggart sifted through the clues, he immediately went to Heilesen. As a congressional candidate in 2012, Heilesen was obligated to disclose his limited income and assets.

But Taggart also found big checks coming from other questionable sources - a junior bankruptcy attorney from Provo, Utah, a Utah Valley State University student living in his parents' home and a Jackson, Wyo., woman who headed a nonprofit.

None had a previous record of contributing money in their own states, let alone Idaho.

So while this trail begins with Heilesen, Wasden's investigation certainly should not stop there.

For instance, he ought to be talking to the two north central Idaho Republican leaders who were at the helm of Integrity in Government - its creator, Ahsahka operative and state GOP Region II Chairwoman LeeAnn Callear, and its treasurer, Idaho County GOP Chairwoman Marge Arnzen.

To put it bluntly, what did these two Republican activists know about how their political action committee got its money - and when did they know it?

Finally, there's the state official elected to safeguard campaign finance transparency in Idaho - Secretary of State Lawrence "Boss" Denney.

Once Jerry and Carrie Scheid of Idaho Falls issued a formal complaint to his office, Denney dutifully referred the matter to Wasden for investigation.

But Integrity in Government was a political ally of the former Idaho House speaker who presided over some of the Legislature's most odious ethical lapses. As speaker, Denney single-handedly buried the Senate's reasonable attempt to require officials and spouses to divulge where they work and some minimal information about their investments.

Now, on Denney's watch, the Sunshine Law has been breached.

Only a federal financial disclosure form Heileson was compelled to complete yielded the clear-cut evidence. And the clues were out there long before Taggart started combing through Sunshine reports.

So Denney now finds himself at the political crossroads.

He can serve the cause of campaign transparency by backing a financial disclosure bill.

He can assign someone on his staff to begin scrutinizing Sunshine reports - and flag irregularities for further review.

Or he can stand by his political cronies and wait for the whole episode to settle down.

Financial corruption has left its calling card at Denney's door. Should he dismiss it, Idaho's headaches will multiply. - M.T.