

Bedke's non-scandal boomerangs on the far right

This editorial was published by the Times-News of Twin Falls.

Republicans in Boise like to reflect a unified front, but it's no big secret to anyone paying attention to the Statehouse that a far-right fringe group of legislators has been leading a mini insurgency against the moderates in leadership positions for years.

That usually quiet battle became much more public last week when Speaker of the House Scott Bedke, a Republican from Oakley, was accused of talking loudly about sex acts and young women during a committee hearing five years ago. Bedke is married, with children and grandchildren, and prides himself on integrity.

The allegation surfaced in an affidavit from the committee's secretary, now living in Colorado, who leaked it to a far-right website in Idaho. The woman claimed she came forward after seeing that Bedke had stripped Rep. Heather Scott of her committees; Scott was overheard saying that women advanced in the Legislature by performing sexual favors.

It's clear the story about Bedke's lewd remarks was intended as political payback for punishing Scott. The far-right websites that first published the affidavit tried to paint Bedke as a hypocrite: How dare he punish Scott for making lewd remarks when it turns out he said much worse things five years ago?

The problem is, the Colorado woman's story has more holes than Swiss cheese, and evidence is mounting that she made the whole thing up. Nobody else in the room with Bedke at the time of the alleged comments remembers him making them. Further, an Idaho State Police investigation shows the woman may have been stalking Bedke at the time. Police gathered evidence the woman was repeatedly texting the speaker and had sent him gifts; she may have been under the delusion they were getting married.

The speaker decided not to prosecute at the time, he told reporters Monday at a meeting where he presented documents to support the claim the woman was stalking him, because he didn't want the media attention.

He's talking with reporters now, to clear his name.

Bedke will almost certainly emerge unscathed from this non-scandal.

He still has wide support from his caucus, and maybe even greater support now because of the ham-handed way his enemies have tried to attack him.

The bigger question is, what does this do for the far right in Idaho, who seem to find ever more creative ways to delegitimize themselves?

The so-called Christian patriots represented by the likes of Scott and her sycophant Rep. Ron Nate can't win with their ideas, so they try to knock down the moderate Republicans in power with faux scandals and shady tactics. Remember, Nate was the lawmaker who tried to secretly record a private conversation with moderate Senate Pro Tem Brent Hill last year.

Idaho is clearly a red state, but it's not nearly as right as some would have it.

Thank God, because if the price of becoming more conservative means adopting these kinds of slimy tactics, we don't want anything to do with it. We'll take Bedke and the moderates any day.