

If not here, where will Bedke draw the line?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Idaho House Speaker Scott Bedke has decreed that state Rep. Janet Trujillo, R-Idaho Falls, and Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star, have "done nothing wrong" by taking \$6,400 of tax money under questionable circumstances.

Try telling that to an employer when one of his workers travels on business and pockets the money intended to purchase a hotel room by staying with friends.

In this case, it's not one night, one week or even one month - but 80 days during which the Idaho Falls Republican claimed the full legislative payment of \$129 per day to cover the cost of a second home in Boise.

But Trujillo married Moyle last year and evidence points to the couple living in their marital domicile located about 20 miles from the state Capitol. As such, she certainly didn't need more than the \$49 per diem assigned to Ada County lawmakers.

You have to connect the dots because neither Trujillo nor Moyle are talking.

Twice now, Trujillo has refused to tell Idaho Falls Post Register reporter Bryan Clark where she spent her nights in Boise or whether she paid rent. She covers herself with the robes of entitlement, saying she's allowed to take the extra money even if she stays "in a box under a bridge" in Boise.

As for Moyle? He was full of moral indignation when former Sens. John McGee, R-Caldwell, and Curt McKenzie, R-Nampa, took per diem checks when they were living rent-free in Boise: "I don't think it smells good; I don't think it looks good; and if it were one of my members, I would highly advise against it."

Now he's mute.

And the speaker resorts to diverting attention to a citizens committee on legislative compensation, which won't meet for another year and does not have the final word.

Try telling that to state Rep. Christy Perry, R-Nampa, and Sen. Jim Guthrie, R-Inkom. On the basis of a right-wing blogger's flimsy assertion that they carried out a romantic affair on the public's dime, Bedke and Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill, R-Rexburg, activated a legislative audit of their travel records. Both were exonerated.

Yet, the case of Trujillo and Moyle is beyond dispute. The record shows they took the money. The only question is whether they acted within a narrow interpretation of the law or within the broader definition of public morality.

Try telling that to former Sens. Jack Noble, R-Kuna, and Monty Pearce, R-New Plymouth, and former state Rep. Phil Hart, R-Hayden.

Each of them faced a formal ethics review.

Noble stood accused of pursuing legislation to advance his own business.

As chairman of the Senate Resources and Conservation Committee, Pearce helped open Idaho to oil and natural gas development - after he had signed an oil and gas lease on his own property.

And Hart augmented his time on the House tax-writing committee by refusing to pay his own income taxes.

Noble resigned. Pearce and Hart subsequently lost re-election bids.

In Idaho, the politicians police themselves. No one other than a fellow legislator can lodge a complaint with the ethics committees. When the speaker says Trujillo and Moyle have "done nothing wrong," do you really expect another lawmaker to disagree?

And try telling that to the average Idahoan. For him, \$6,400 is not mere chump change.

It's the equivalent of a Lewis-Clark State College student's tuition payments for two semesters - with maybe enough left to buy a tank of gas.

It's five months work for anyone earning the minimum wage in Idaho.

Hand an Idaho teacher \$6,400 and she could provide school supplies for an entire classroom, maybe two.

What Trujillo and Moyle collected in 80 days would pay the average Idahoan's health insurance premiums for a year.

It would cover the property tax bills of two or three average families.

It's also enough to buy groceries for a family of four for a year.

How could Trujillo, Moyle and Bedke not know this?

Could it be that in a state where the Republican Party is supreme, they have nothing to fear, at least not from the voters? - M.T.