

Why so quiet?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Reps. Heather Scott, R-Blanchard, Mike Kingsley, R-Lewiston, Priscilla Giddings, R-White Bird, and Ron Nate, R-Rexburg.

Where are these self-appointed guardians of Idaho's probity?

Earlier this year, the Idaho Falls Post Register's Bryan Clark unearthed a startling fact: Rep. Janet Trujillo, R-Idaho Falls, has taken the equivalent of a full-year's tuition at Lewis-Clark State College under questionable circumstances.

Idaho extends \$129 to legislators each day they are in session to cover their living expenses in Boise. Lawmakers who reside in Boise, and therefore don't need as much, accept \$49 a day.

Trujillo is the spouse of House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star.

The evidence points to Trujillo living at the couple's marital domicile but taking the full \$129 daily payment as if she established a separate Boise residence. That adds up to \$6,400.

Neither Trujillo nor Moyle has explained - although the majority leader was more than forthcoming when former Sens. John McGee, R-Caldwell, and Curt McKenzie, R-Nampa, took full per-diem checks while living rent-free in Boise: "I don't think it smells good."

Closing the books on this affair, House Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, declared Trujillo and Moyle had "done nothing wrong." Here's betting there will be no ethics review nor will legislative auditors be assigned to look into the matter.

As you read on this page Wednesday, Idaho's Democratic Party is not making much of a stink about this.

That's disappointing. But what's absolutely startling is the dearth of comments from a conservative faction that is so sanctimoniously eager to accuse Bedke and the GOP establishment at every turn of engaging in unethical conduct, cronyism and self-entitlement.

"There are two parties up in Boise, and it's not the Republican and Democrat like you may think," Scott told an eastern Idaho group last fall. "It's the gravy train party and the party working for the people. The gravy train party are voting in special perks and special rights for their individual gain."

If taking an extra \$6,400 in living expense money isn't a "gravy train," what is it?

Giddings - who this spring brought the House to a standstill over a technical reading of the state Constitution - has bemoaned "career politicians" in the Legislature who make "horrific" decisions and "used lawlessness to exert power of the people to further tarnish the Legislature."

Elsewhere, Giddings has written: "I will continue to stand for principles of integrity, transparency and accountability, but your help is needed because within the Legislature, these principles are not a high priority."

If anybody merits the moniker "career politician," why wouldn't it be Moyle? The last time Moyle wasn't throwing his weight around the state Capitol, Bill Clinton was still getting haircuts aboard Air Force One.

Then there's Nate. His self-righteousness knows no bounds - not even when it comes to surreptitiously recording private conversations with fellow lawmakers, notably Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill, R-Rexburg.

"The 'establishment' in Idaho politics runs on backroom deals, party politics, cronyism and betrayal of the public trust," laments Nate. "Idaho needs legislators who will stand up for the citizens of Idaho and push back against the establishment who are more interested in the powers and perks of public office than in doing what's right for the people."

"Powers and perks of public office"? What would Nate call \$6,400 in unwarranted living expense money?

To be fair, Kinglsey has eschewed such incendiary rhetoric. But these are some of his political allies. He's also joined Idaho Falls Republican Bryan Zollinger to form the House Freedom Caucus - arguably because Bedke and the party elders are standing in their way.

Why haven't we heard from the House Freedom Caucus?

Scott, Giddings, Nate and Kingsley have not been shy about taking the "establishment" to task. But now, when what they say and do could have real consequences, they clam up.

What's scaring them off?

CHEERS ... to the voters of north central Idaho's rural school districts. When it comes to paying the bills, they're at a huge disadvantage.

Thanks to former interim Gov. Jim Risch's 2006 tax shift - which gutted Idaho's system of equalizing property tax levies among rich and poor districts - these communities must tax themselves at substantially higher rates.

For instance, Troy's property tax base works out to \$576,243 per student. In other words, Troy's patrons must pay five times as much property tax as their counterparts in the McCall-Donnelly School District.

Yet the people of Troy Tuesday agreed by 79 percent to ante up \$995,000 in property taxes to cover school programs the state budget will not support.

Elsewhere, the story is much the same:

- Cottonwood's tax base is even less robust; it works out to \$397,056 per student - or less than one-seventh of the resources available to McCall-Donnelly. Nonetheless, Cottonwood voters went 71 percent in favor of a \$350,000 levy.
- Salmon River can put about \$1.14 million in tax base behind each of its students. That's still about a third of the wealth available to the district's southern neighbors. But voters agreed by 79 percent to impose a \$525,000 tax bill upon themselves.
- Nezperce has the equivalent of \$885,051 in tax wealth per student, which means it must tax its patrons three times as harshly as those in McCall-Donnelly. Nezperce patrons also voted by a 79 percent margin to pay \$445,000 in local taxes to support schools.
- Whitepine's property wealth works out to \$823,992 per student - or again, less than a third of the money available to support a wealthier district. But 70 percent of voters were willing to tax themselves \$850,000 for good schools.

JEERS ... to Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho. Along with Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Va., Labrador has sponsored a bill to penalize "sanctuary" cities that refuse to cooperate in the detention of undocumented workers.

The measure also would hire and arm a deportation force of 12,500.

Idaho has no sanctuary cities. Only a few, notably Boise and Twin Falls, have passed resolutions defining themselves as "welcoming cities."

Short of cross-deputizing them, local officers have no authority to enforce federal immigration laws. But even the impression they might puts cops in a bind: Undocumented workers won't report crimes if they fear doing so will lead to their deportation.

Besides, wasn't Labrador the fellow who Idahoans sent back to Congress seven years ago to help reform the nation's immigration laws? What happened to that? - M.T.