

Wrong, Frank

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Melaleuca President and CEO Frank VanderSloot of Idaho Falls. If you wonder what gets people hyperventilating about the eastern Idaho gazillionaire's heavy-handed political tactics, take a look at his weekend advertisement in the Tribune and elsewhere in the state.

For Vandersloot, state schools Superintendent Tom Luna's legislative blitzkrieg on the tenure and collective bargaining rights of Idaho teachers was a twofer: He likes Luna and he despises organized labor.

So Sunday, VanderSloot backed Luna's legislative package and accused the teachers' union of skullduggery. By trying to repeal the Luna laws - including a shift from classroom teachers to online instruction - at the Nov. 6 election, VanderSloot's ad said the union would deprive Idaho's teachers of \$38.8 million in merit pay.

"The union bosses craftily wrote Proposition 2 so that if it is voted down, it will repeal the very law that allows the bonuses to be paid," the ad claimed. "If Proposition 2 passes before Dec. 15, 2012, 80 percent of all Idaho teachers will receive an average bonus of \$2,000. If Prop 2 does not pass, teachers will receive no bonus at all!"

Take a breath, Frank.

Look up the state law.

Call Secretary of State Ben Ysursa.

Check in with your conservative crony, Idaho Freedom Foundation Executive Director Wayne Hoffman, who opined on this topic Monday.

Here's what they'd show you:

You're wrong.

Merit pay is law now. As the referendum campaign was gathering momentum in 2011, Luna and Idaho Republicans took the unusual step of passing an emergency clause to prevent opponents from putting it on hold pending the election.

And that law says Luna must release the merit pay money no later than Nov. 15 when the state makes its third of five funding allocations to local schools.

Even if voters repeal Prop 2 on Nov. 6, the law remains in effect for another 15 days. That's how long it will take the state Board of Canvassers - Ysursa, Treasurer Ron Crane and acting Controller Brandon Woolf - to certify the results.

Bottom line: Teachers will get their bonuses no matter what VanderSloot says.

JEERS ... to state Rep. Brian Cronin, D-Boise. His party's House caucus chairman, Cronin is not just passing through the revolving door from public servant to private consultant. He's still spinning within it.

Cronin, who did not seek re-election, will leave the Legislature at the end of the year. Meanwhile, he's become senior vice president of Strategies 360. That means while he's working for you, he's also drawing a paycheck consulting for Idaho Parents and Teachers Together, the group working to repeal the Luna laws.

Cronin is right on the issue.

He's wrong on the tactics.

There's a bright red line separating public service from private gain. Cronin doesn't see it.

But here's the test: Who gains from this duality? Not the public. Perhaps not even Cronin's clients. Cronin does, however. Serving as an incumbent legislator - even for a few more weeks - gives him a credibility no mere private political consultant enjoys.

Technically, Cronin is under no conflict of interest. He's complying with Idaho ethics laws. That's just the defense so many Idaho Republicans have employed to evade charges of inappropriate behavior.

Seeing Cronin now engage in the same conduct is a disappointment.

JEERS .. to Moscow landlord Rick Beebe. He leases space in his building at 1350 Troy Road to the Idaho Department of Labor and the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare.

Monday, Beebe booted GOP state Senate candidate Gresham Bouma off the premises. Bouma had the notion of using the labor department office as a backdrop for a press conference on job creation.

Maybe it was not the most sensitive thing to do. People who are out of work or in some kind of distress seek out help from both agencies. They're understandably shy about playing a bit part in a politician's campaign.

But nothing in state law or regulations gave Beebe authority to evict the political event from his premises. Checking in with the secretary of state's office would have told him as much. Instead, he relied on a state worker's opinion.

Plus, there's a moral obligation. Beebe draws income renting space to government offices. He's making money from taxpayers. If there's a question about public access and someone's First Amendment rights, he ought to err in favor of free speech.

JEERS to U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo and Jim Risch, both R-Idaho. They were among 40 Republicans who last week blocked Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., in her attempt to launch a \$1 billion Veterans Jobs Corp Act. Five Republicans joined her effort, but it fell short of the number needed to break a filibuster.

Republicans contend Murray and the Democrats were playing politics by blocking a GOP alternative they claim would have been more fiscally responsible.

In a \$3.6 trillion federal budget, however, \$1 billion is a rounding error.

Only a sliver of the American public has paid the burdens of a dozen years of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. The rest of the country has moved on.

Now these veterans return, only to find themselves caught up in a hostile economy. The jobless rate for veterans who have served since Sept. 11, 2001, is 12.7 percent. That's 50 percent higher than the national average.

However imperfect Murray's legislation, it beats doing nothing? - M.T.