

For EVI, rumor mill was worse than the truth

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

By the time Education Voters of Idaho disclosed where it got \$641,000 to promote the Luna laws Wednesday, there was more curiosity than alarm.

Idahoans had expected far more nefarious characters behind that donation than people such as Albertsons heir Joe Scott, who has ties to on-line instruction provider K12 Inc., and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Scott gave \$250,000. Bloomberg gave \$200,000.

They had expected the source of EVI's bankroll to be someone who stood to profit from the Luna laws. Someone such as the owners of Hewlett-Packard, which just signed an eight-year, \$182 million contract to provide laptops to Idaho's high school students. Equipping students with laptops is a central feature of the Luna laws, which face a referendum vote Tuesday. If the measures are rejected, HP's contract disappears.

Now where would Idahoans get such a jaded notion?

Would it be from watching state Rep. Phil Hart, R-Athol, use his office as a shield against paying income taxes on time like everybody else?

Or how about House State Affairs Committee Chairman Tom Loertcher, R-Iona, deep-sixing a bill that stood to interfere with his road abandonment dispute with Bonneville County?

Could it be the \$750,000 check Idaho wrote former Transportation Director Pam Lowe - after paying its own lawyers more than \$614,000 - to make her shut up? Among other things, Lowe accused the state Transportation Board of axing her after she tried to stop some of Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's cronies from cashing in on the \$1 billion "Connecting Idaho" project.

Or how about former State Tax Commission Chairman Royce Chigbrow? Otter's former campaign treasurer was forced from office for his sweetheart dealing with corporate taxpayers - and barely escaped prosecution.

Has anybody forgotten about state Treasurer Ron Crane's lavish spending of public funds on his credit rating trips to New York City or tax dollars on his own commute from Nampa to Boise - which also drew the attention of prosecutors?

Then there's former Sen. John McGee, R-Caldwell, and Sen. Curt McKenzie, R-Nampa, who slept rent-free in Boise but padded their official expense accounts.

Or how about Senate Resources and Conservation Committee Chairman Monty Pearce, R-New Plymouth? Pearce shepherded to passage laws that opened Idaho to oil and gas exploration - after he locked in a lease with Snake River Oil and Gas, making him a partner with one of the big players behind the legislation.

Is it any surprise the Center for Public Integrity, Global Integrity and Public Radio International said Idaho is about to cross over from one-party cronyism into corruption?

No wonder many Idahoans had assumed the worst - that a company on the cusp of earning hundreds of millions was willing to spend a few hundred thousand on a clandestine political advertising campaign.

EVI is headed by some of the most astute political brains in Idaho - former state Rep. Debbie Field, R-Boise, former congressional staffer John Foster and master lobbyist Phil Reberger. If anyone had an inkling about how the steady drumbeat about their refusal to follow Idaho's Sunshine law was undermining their message, it would be these three.

Plus, of course, yielding to Secretary of State Ben Ysursa's demand for disclosure frees EVI to spend any new contributions it picks up between now and the election. And you'll vote before knowing where it came from. - M.T.