

Pants on fire

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

JEERS ... to Idaho schools Superintendent Tom Luna. Idaho's master of deception just stuck you with a long-term contract to buy Wi-Fi networks for your high schools.

Luna took \$2.25 million in money state lawmakers assigned for one-time school technology projects and parlayed it into a five-year obligation that could extend into 15 years and \$33.75 million.

Lawmakers say Luna caught them flatfooted. You're surprised?

This is a fellow who first blind-sided and then vilified his fellow elected officials on the State Land Board in order to raid the Endowment Fund - and look like a public education hero on the eve of his 2010 re-election campaign.

He's the guy who rode to victory by praising the schools but upon winning a second term declared war on teachers and passed - without ever seeking public support - three measures aimed at undermining educators' collective bargaining rights and siphoning dollars meant to pay teachers toward the for-profit online instruction and laptop computer industries.

Once again, he has displayed contempt for the voters. So what if you repealed all three Luna Laws last fall, including the technology component by 66.7 percent? Luna Laws-lite is back - even though Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter has convened a task force to devise what reforms Idaho tax dollars should buy. After Wi-Fi, what comes next? Laptops?

He has showcased his penchant for cutting sweetheart deals. Remember the laptop computer contract Luna inked last fall before voters repealed the package? That one had taxpayers leasing high-priced equipment from Hewlett-Packard.

Negotiated by Luna's Department of Education rather than the state Division of Purchasing, this latest arrangement provides the contractor owns the Wi-Fi equipment it installs in the schools.

In other words, it holds high school students hostage. If lawmakers fail to renew the appropriation each year, the Wi-Fi equipment is yanked, disrupting schools.

And Luna has resorted to more cronyism. Nashville, Tenn.-based Education Networks of America prevailed over two Idaho firms - Ednetics of Post Falls and Tek-Hut Inc., of Twin Falls.

Did ENA submit the low bid? Not necessarily. An interview committee "scored" the bidders.

Of course, ENA just happens to be the only firm politically tied to Luna. As the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell reported, ENA contributed \$6,000 to Luna's campaign. Garry Lough,

Idaho director of customer services for ENA, was employed at Luna's shop and the Department of Administration until last year.

Sen. Dean Cameron, R-Rupert, and co-chairman of the Legislature's budget-writing committee, said the Luna deal is "certainly a stretch and perhaps borderline on a lack of honesty."

Borderline?

JEERS ... to Washington state Sen. Mark Schoesler, R-Ritzville. You have to buy your own lunch. Why can't Schoesler? Taxpayers pay him \$42,000 a year plus \$90 a day to cover his expenses when he's in Olympia.

But if there's a lobbyist around, Schoesler is willing to let him pick up the check. The Associated Press found the Ritzville Republican among the five senators who most readily accepted free lunches. Schoesler is reported to have consumed \$1,101 worth of meals during the first four months of the year.

Washington's ethics law prohibits public officials from taking freebies on more than "infrequent occasions."

Schoesler is crying foul because a Democratic precinct captain filed an ethics complaint on the five Republicans.

That doesn't pass the laugh test.

Do you think lobbyists buy Schoesler's meals because of his good looks and personal charm?

CHEERS ... to Idaho Secretary of State Ben Ysursa. Every two years, his office publishes the Idaho Blue Book, which is basically the owner's manual to state government.

Ysursa's signature touch is the book's dedication - recognizing people who made a lasting contribution to the state. Eight years ago, the tribute went to the armed services. In 2007, former Gov. Cecil Andrus drew the accolade.

This year, Ysursa has highlighted three men who helped kick the Aryan Nations out of its Hayden Lake headquarters:

- Bill Wassmuth - The former Roman Catholic priest led the Kootenai County Task Force on Human Relations and rallied northern Idaho toward the cause of human rights. Wassmuth died Aug. 27, 2002.
- Norman Gissel - The Coeur d'Alene lawyer brought help to victims of malicious harassment. Among them were Victoria and Jason Keenan, who had been shot at by guards at the Aryan Nations compound. Gissel persuaded the Keenans to file a lawsuit and secured Morris Dees of the Southern Poverty Law Center to pursue it. That case bankrupted the Aryan Nations and sent it packing.

- Tony Stewart - Of the many stories about northern Idaho resistance to the Aryan Nations, many converge on this North Idaho College political science professor. He packaged the human relations task force PR campaign and worked on the Keenan case.

JEERS ... to Idaho health insurance exchange board Chairman Stephen Weeg. Under his leadership, the panel setting up the Obamacare-related state-based exchange Thursday planned to retire into a Boise lawyer's office and then meet behind closed doors for about four hours.

Weeg thinks the panel needs to preserve its intellectual property.

But how do we know what they talked about?

Did they rant and rave about individual insurance companies?

Vent about Obamacare critic and Idaho Freedom Foundation leader Wayne Hoffman?

Who is Weeg kidding? While passing this Obama-

care-related measure was the right thing to do, it remains a contentious issue. The last thing the package can afford is the kind of public skepticism closed-door meetings always create. - M.T.