

Even Trump has a right to public records

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston TribuneIdaho Secretary of State Lawrence Denney could and should challenge President Donald Trump's motive for looking over the Gem State's voter information.

Smarting over the fact that he holds office without benefit of majority support - Trump won the Electoral College but came up short by about 3 million votes to Hillary Clinton - the president alleged that as many as 5 million people cast ballots illegally.

"In addition to winning the Electoral College in a landslide, I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally," Trump wrote Nov. 27.

Now the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity, headed up by Vice President Mike Pence and Kansas Secretary of State Kris Kobach, has put Denney and his counterparts on the spot by seeking "publicly-available voter roll data ... including, if publicly available under the laws of your state, the full first and last names of all registrants, middle names or initials if available, addresses, dates of birth, political party (if recorded in your state), last four digits of Social Security numbers if available, voter history (elections voted in) from 2006 forward, active/inactive status, canceled status, information regarding any felony convictions, information regarding voter registration in another state, information regarding military status, and overseas citizen information."

Denney could and should follow in the footsteps of Washington Secretary of State Kim Wyman, who called Trump's assertion of massive, widespread voter fraud "ludicrous on its face."

Denney could and should challenge Trump's willingness to waste the public's money and time just to assuage his easily bruised ego.

Denney could and should point out the saving grace of the American election system is its decentralized nature. Authority is divided among 50 states, and further delegated to local officials involving more than 9,000 people. At a time when Russia is probing for any weakness in that system, this is no time to make President Vladimir Putin's job any easier by federalizing the process. If anyone should stand up for "states' rights," why not a Republican secretary of state from ruby red Idaho?

Denney could and should defend the integrity of Idaho elections and the people responsible for safeguarding the franchise - from the 44 county election clerks to the professional team he inherited from his predecessor, former Secretary of State Ben Ysursa. As a starting point, Denney should remind everyone what he learned last November by spending a couple of days as a poll worker with Nez Perce County Clerk Patty Weeks' staff.

Denney could and should reiterate that some the material Trump's tribunal wants is off limits.

Social Security numbers? No.

Dates of birth? Forget it.

Driver's licenses, phone numbers, email addresses? Get a copy of the Fourth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, Mr. President, and read it.

But you can go too far. Some state officials - ranging from California Secretary of State Alex Padilla to New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo - are refusing to comply at all. Idaho Democratic legislative leaders would like to see Denney "reject this unwarranted intrusion."

That's a dangerous idea.

When it involves requests for public documents, it does not matter who is asking - or even why.

In Idaho, the fact that you voted in an election (but not for whom) is a matter of public record.

So is your full name and address.

And thanks to the Idaho GOP, whether you formally registered as a Republican to vote in that party's closed primary is also a matter open for public review.

If Denney decides he can withhold public documents from a White House with a dubious agenda, what's to stop him from rejecting your request for the same information on whatever grounds he chooses?

Denney, of course, knows this. Although he's taking his time, the secretary of state intends to treat the matter as public records request - which means private information including Social Security numbers would be withheld.

Good for him.

If Denney publicly chastises the president first, that would be even better. - M.T.