

One-party Myth Debunked

Idaho offers viable candidates from both parties.

By Trent L. Clark

Political pundits today seem preoccupied with the dominance of Republican leadership and success of Republican candidates in Idaho. Maybe some are sincerely concerned for the vibrancy of state politics. But others appear to be sincere, comprised mostly of mere critics of Republican policies who lack any similar disdain for the even more lopsided political systems found historically in states like Maryland, Massachusetts and Hawaii.

To begin with, these critics often exaggerate the true magnitude of Idaho's Republican prevalence. Only a fraction of Idaho voters consider themselves "Republicans." The state's single largest voting bloc is "independent." Public opinion surveys consistently show only 25-30 percent self-identify as consistent Republican voters. By contrast, 20-25 percent are reliable Democrats. That puts the Republican "lock" at a mere 5 to 10 percent advantage with nearly half of the vote still up for grabs.

Furthermore, Democrats in Idaho do not lack for enthusiastic volunteers or candidates, especially at the county level where issues are less partisan. And even in races for the state Legislature, Democrats will be running in all but three districts this year, having done an admirable job of recruiting candidates they hope will put them in position to control the Idaho House in 2002.

And yet those who complain most loudly about Idaho's "one party" usually point accusingly to Republicans. Is it up to the Republican Party to ensure a successful and winning Democratic team?

The job of a party is to offer solutions, to advance a platform that clearly lays out philosophy and principle. Most importantly, a party creates opportunities for individuals to participate in the political process, to influence policy and to help elect like-minded candidates. If a party does those jobs well, it will be successful.



Trent Clark, chairman of the Idaho Republican Party, disputes the notion of a GOP "lock" on elections.

True, America has seen corrupt one-party regimes. Mayor Daley's Chicago Machine, and Gov. Huey Long's underhandedness in Louisiana are notorious examples of how a monopoly was used to close and manipulate a political system. But the contrast with Idaho Republicans couldn't be greater. The Grand Ol' Party in Idaho is not run by an all-powerful "boss," but is organized from the grassroots up, with local organizations in each of the 44 counties.

Furthermore, this year Republicans offered Idahoans a chance to pick the party's candidates in 102 county and legislative primaries. Contested primaries are a sign of healthy citizen participation in a party. The last thing Mayor Daley would tolerate in Chicago was a primary to select the Democrats' nominee.

Fortunately, free elections and democracy work amazingly well, and Idaho is no exception. Even if you assume Idaho to be

a Republican state, Republicans themselves do not and cannot take that for granted. The day they do is the first day of the next Democratic comeback.

Idaho Republicans cannot and will not rest on our laurels or offer up lesser candidates just to create the appearance of balance in Idaho politics. We will continue to give the voters our very best. In doing so, we advance not only the interest of the party, but also the political choices available to all Idahoans. □

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