



Idaho Democratic Party

News release from the Idaho Democratic Party

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -

Idaho Democrats Denounce Finance Committee's Decision to Pay Republican Party Legal Bills with Taxpayer Dollars

(Boise)—Idaho Democratic Party leaders blasted the decision of the Joint Finance & Appropriations Committee to reimburse attorneys of the Idaho Republican Party \$100,000 for costs associated with a lawsuit that sought to open primaries close their primary elections to all but those who self-identify as Republicans. "It's bad enough that Republicans have clogged up the courts with their party purification campaign but to ask the taxpayers of Idaho to pick up the tab goes beyond brazen," said Idaho

Democratic Party Chairman Larry Grant. "Not only did Republicans sue to make their party more extremist and more ideological but now they've sent their legal bills to the Legislature during the most severe fiscal crisis since the Great Depression. Remarkably, Republican legislators approved such an outrageous expense. Did any of them think to recuse themselves from voting on this bill given the obvious conflict of interest with their party being the direct benefactor here?"

The lawsuit was driven by a faction within the Republican Party that was concerned that their primary elections were being determined by crossover votes from non-Republicans, leading to election results that the far-right wing considers unacceptable. In a recent U.S. District court ruling, Judge Lynn Winmill noted that restricted primaries "will likely have the 'very real and immediate effect of ... producing more ideologically extreme candidates.'"

"The state of Idaho is being asked to pay an exorbitant sum to resolve the internal struggles within the Republican Party," said Senate Minority Leader Edgar Malepeai. "We could pay for at least three more teachers with this money, during a year when districts are being forced to reduce teaching personnel. It's inexcusable."

For several decades, Idaho voters have not been required to claim party affiliation in order to vote in a primary election. In fact, a 2011 BSU Public Policy Survey found that 42% of Idahoans consider themselves neither a Democrat nor a Republican. Pending legislation in the Statehouse would force voters to select a party affiliation in order to participate in primary elections. "It is unconscionable that the state should pay for the Republican Party to limit a voter's access to the ballot. If the Republicans want a private club, they should foot the bill," said House Minority Leader John Rusche. "If this appropriation bill makes its way through the Legislature, we would hope that Governor Otter would have the good sense—and respect for the taxpayer—to veto this indefensible use of state money."

Democratic legislators in JFAC voted unanimously to oppose the payments.

XXX