

The state secret Wayne Hoffman let slip

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Sought or not, Wayne Hoffman has earned your gratitude.

The director of the right-wing Idaho Freedom Foundation is credited with exposing the inner workings of Idaho's new closed Republican Primary election.

This was presented as a way to purify the GOP from independent thinkers, moderates and even the handful of Democrats who choose to cast ballots in what is often the real election in a one-party state.

But it's also a way to publicly document who votes Republican in Idaho, how often they vote Republican in Idaho - and by inference, all those who do not vote Republican in Idaho.

From now on, every time you vote in the Idaho GOP primary, you first register as a Republican voter. It's a matter of public record. So far, Idaho Democrats don't require voters to register before voting in their primary. But the fact that you voted in a primary but not as a Republican remains subject to public inspection.

So it cuts either way - you're either registered as one of the GOP faithful or you're not.

All of which already was causing consternation among professionals who are expected to show impartiality - journalists and judges come to mind. Hoffman then supposedly hinted he might out any Idaho journalist who votes as a registered Republican. That set off a debate in newsrooms across the state.

Hoffman maintains he said no such thing. Maybe he didn't. Or maybe the Titan of Transparency decided to back away before someone pointed out, once again, his own hypocrisy.

Whether it's conservative billionaires David H. Koch and Charles G. Koch, Idaho libertarian guru Ralph Smeed's estate or even eastern Idaho's Melaleuca CEO Frank VanderSloot who bankrolls Hoffman's enterprise, he isn't saying.

Either way, here's what he told the Tribune's Brad Gary: "I never said I was going to go around and make an effort to publish that information. I said that information would be useful."

Useful?

To whom?

Certainly to political parties. Election after election, the Idaho GOP will compile a list of its reliable voters. Its base. The people it can count on to turn out at the polls. To put up yard signs. To contribute money.

The party also can identify the people who switch in and out of its ranks, voting in a GOP election this year and a Democratic contest the next. These Republicans in Name Only are the kind of people the GOP wants to cull from its ranks and certainly from its roll of candidates.

But there's also room for mischief.

How about the political operative who wants to discredit a newspaper reporter before the campaign begins?

Or the liberal lawyer who wants to disqualify a judge as a card-carrying Republican?

What happens to the small-town high school government teacher whose voting pattern gets scrutinized by a group of parents? Does he edit what he says in class about historical or political figures?

Or the small business owner who can no longer hide his political affiliation from his customers?

It's illegal for a boss to inquire about a worker's political leanings. But nothing can stop that employer from probing the voting behavior of people he has hired, might hire or plans to promote.

What about the physician who is pro-choice and wants to make certain any nurse on his staff shares that view? A good clue would be whether he votes as a Republican, which has a history of attracting pro-life voters and candidates.

Or the state agency head who wants to guarantee his next chief deputy or press spokesman is a steady Republican voter? Registration records will fill in the blanks.

Even the conservative corporate executive who wants to promote a like-minded staffer has the opportunity to research the voting registration of his subordinates.

Far-fetched?

Don't be so sure. Hoffman didn't corner the market on imagination. He's merely more talkative. - M.T.