

Five Myths About Local Elections

by Jeff Ward, IFRR President



With Election Day coming up on May 21st, the political grapevine has been spewing forth some beliefs about local elections that are just plain untrue.

Myth one: All local elections are nonpartisan

It may be a surprise but many local elections in Idaho are not "nonpartisan" by law. The only elections in Idaho that are by law strictly "non-partisan" are those of judges. The Idaho Constitution specifies that judicial candidates "shall not be nominated nor endorsed by any political party and their names shall not appear on any political party ticket, nor be accompanied on the ballot by any political party designation." No other offices in Idaho have those restrictions.

Although some elections (Highway Commissioners) are designated to be conducted in a nonpartisan manner, the only legal requirement is that party designation does not appear on the ballot. In the case of Mayors and City Council, the law only designates that on a candidate's Declaration of Candidacy "there shall be no mention relating to party or principal of the nominee." The law is completely silent on many offices (School Trustees, College Trustees, and Hospital Boards) and in those cases there is nonpartisan ballot listings only because of custom instead of the rule of law.

Myth Two: Local candidates are nonpartisan

The idea that people who serve in offices in which party is not listed on the ballot are somehow disconnected from partisan politics is nonsense. That has never been the case. As far back as 1911, Coeur d'Alene Mayor John Travers Wood was elected on the Socialist Party ticket (to his credit years later he was elected as an anti-Communist Republican Congressman.) Today, many (if not most) local elected officials are active in political parties. Notable multi-term officeholders like Coeur d'Alene City Councilman Mike Kennedy, NIC and Library Trustee Judy Meyer and Post Falls School Trustee Michelle Lippert have been active Democrats while Lake Highway Commissioner Monty Montgomery, Post Falls City Councilman Kerri Thoreson and Rathdrum Mayor Vic Holmes have been active Republicans. Numerous local officeholders are, or have been, political party precinct officials including Betty Ann Henderson, Fred Meckel, Jeri Delange, Rod Tweet, Joe Malloy, Ron Nilson, and Terry Werner. Most other local officials are registered to vote by party. Reagan Republicans did not bring partisan politics to local government. It was already well entrenched.

Myth Three: Local elections are small potatoes

The idea the local government boards are small and insignificant is also completely false. Total local annual budgets for the taxing districts and municipalities in Kootenai County are well over a half a billion dollars (that's a "B" in "billion.") These government districts are responsible for the education of our children, oversight of public safety, providing healthcare, maintaining our roads and bridges, providing water, garbage and sewer services, and the running of our college and libraries. They impact our daily lives more than the state and federal government combined. The voters deserve to know how candidates will manage these important responsibilities and these huge budgets. If you sit out local elections you are abdicating your right to impact government in a huge way.

Myth Four: Reagan Republicans is the only partisan group involved in local elections

First of all, Reagan Republicans is a group of Republicans not a Republican group. KCRR is not answerable to the Republican National Committee and that gives us the unique ability to endorse candidates in 'nonpartisan' and primary elections. That is why we have endorsed the conservative candidates Brent Regan and Anne Seddon for Coeur d'Alene School Trustees, Glorie Ward and Carol Goodman for Post Falls School trustees and Donna Montgomery and Jim Pierce for Hospital Board. Yet

KCRR is not the only group in our community with strong ties to a political party. The local teacher unions, like their state (IEA) and national (NEA) counterparts, are highly connected to the Democrat Party and are going "all in" for our local school board races. A new political action committee with deep pockets called Balance North Idaho, seeks to "balance" our local governments with a swing to the left. The PAC is headed by prominent Democrats and former politicians supported by Democrats. Both groups attempt to hide their political leanings but behind whitewash it is dark Democrat blue. The only difference between them and us is that KCRR is proud to declare where we stand and promote the governing philosophy of our candidates while these opposing groups seek to hide how they will govern under the cloak of "non-partisanship."

Myth Five: People want nonpartisan elections.

This old canard has been around since the time of the turn of last century Progressives who heralded non-partisan elections. The facts show something quite different. Year in and year out the lowest turnout in elections are for nonpartisan offices and the highest is for partisan offices. Every election in Kootenai County with party identified on the ballot has had greater turnout than any elections without party identified. Even in the same election (November 2012) each and every partisan office had more voters vote than the highest voted office with no party listing. In fact even the unopposed (except for write-ins) partisan County Commissioner races had more voters than the competitive county-wide "nonpartisan" North Idaho College Trustee races. Voters vote with their feet in nonpartisan elections. They vote no. Not just in Kootenai but everywhere, without the party designations people stay home from the