

Find Idaho's Democratic Party in the morgue

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

We went looking for the pulse of the Idaho Democratic Party the other day.

We couldn't find it.

Only a political party without a heartbeat lets the Idaho GOP off the hook while it tolerates a twice-accused and once-convicted sexual offender among its ranks in the state House of Representatives.

Rep. Mark Patterson, R-Boise, pleaded guilty to a 1974 assault with intent to commit rape in Florida. But, because the judge gave him a withheld judgment, he's entitled to say he has no felony conviction. Three years later, Patterson again was charged with rape, this time in Ohio, where he was tried and acquitted.

Patterson blames everyone else for his troubles: Ada County Sheriff Gary Raney had no business disclosing his criminal history, the victim in the Florida case recanted, the cops lied and, of course, Patterson has a hazy recollection of the incident because chemotherapy treatments impaired his memory.

Patterson kept all of this from the voters when they elected him last year.

Anywhere else, Democrats would be all over Patterson and his party.

Missouri Republican Congressman Todd Akin made idiotic comments about "legitimate rape" and his campaign against Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., was shattered.

The minute Indiana Treasurer Richard Mourdock said he'd opposed abortion "even if life begins in the horrible situation of rape, that it is something that God intended to happen," Indiana Democratic Chairman Dan Parker was all over him, accusing Mourdock of believing "God intended rape."

But 11 days after the Idaho Statesman's Dan Popkey broke the story about the lawmaker's criminal background, not one Democrat has called for Patterson's resignation.

Nor have they held Patterson's allies to account.

Congressman Raul Labrador, R-Idaho, said he was "proud to endorse" Patterson. Why hasn't Democratic congressional candidate Shirley Ringo at least asked Labrador what he knew about Patterson's background and when he knew it?

Same for former House Speaker Lawrence (Boss) Denney, who said he looked "forward to and am excited to have a man of Mark Patterson's background ... join our team in the House of Representatives."

Where's the Democrat who asks Denney what this reveals about the kind of judgment he would display as secretary of state?

Likewise, why hasn't someone asked House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star, whether his character reference for Patterson still stands?

In the right hands, Patterson could become the poster child for an Idaho version of the GOP's war on women by stringing together these facts:

- Three years ago, this party labeled oral contraceptives an "abortifacient" and then supported giving pharmacists the authority to refuse to dispense birth control pills to their female customers.
- Nearly two years ago, this party sought to force women to undergo an invasive transvaginal ultrasound - in essence, government-sponsored rape - before getting an abortion. Asked to explain, the bill's sponsor, Sen. Chuck Winder, R-Boise, said, "I would hope that when a woman goes in to a physician with a rape issue, that physician will indeed ask her about perhaps her marriage, was this pregnancy caused by normal relations in a marriage or was it truly caused by a rape? I assume that's part of the counseling that goes on."

How's that for sensitivity?

- All of Idaho's top positions are held by Republican men. Not a single woman sits in Congress, holds high office in state government or any position within the GOP legislative leadership.

Idaho's highest-ranking women are Democrats - Senate Minority Leader Michelle Stennett of Ketchum, Senate Minority Caucus Chairwoman Cherie Buckner-Webb of Boise and House Minority Caucus Chairwoman Donna Pence of Gooding.

Can you imagine what might happen if Stennett, Buckner-Webb or Pence raised their voices in protest? They might convert some Republican women - who provided the crucial swing vote necessary to defeat the 2012 referendum on state schools Superintendent Tom Luna's education overhaul package.

If the role were reversed - if an Idaho Democrat had Patterson's skeletons in his closet - do you really think the GOP would remain mum? Of course not. That's how a two-party system functions.

Only a political organization that has been transferred from the intensive care unit to the county morgue would pass on an opportunity like this.

So tell us where to send the flowers.

Looks like we missed the memorial service - M.T.