

Winmill is what Idaho says; Otter is what it does

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

To hear all the harrumphing going on about it, you'd think Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter tripped on his shoe laces again when he said U.S. District Judge B. Lynn Winmill does not share Idaho values.

Speaking to a Capitol for a Day group at Craigmont Feb. 7, Otter bemoaned the federal judge's ruling sealing off U.S. Highway 12 from Otter's friends in the megaload industry.

Winmill "doesn't share all of the enthusiasm for the marketplace and freedom that we do in Idaho," Otter said.

Harrumph, wrote the Idaho Statesman's Dan Popkey.

Just look at the sterling resume:

Fourth generation Idahoan.

Worked his way up through an undergraduate degree at Idaho State University. Graduated from Harvard Law School.

Served as a state district court judge and then won appointment to the federal bench in the 1990s - with the support of Idaho's Republican senators, Larry Craig and Dirk Kempthorne.

Married to his wife Judy for more than 40 years. Father of four.

And Winmill has "never been convicted of DUI or any other crime," Popkey noted.

That's a shot at Otter, who divorced his first wife, Gay Simplot, in 1992 - the same year he was convicted of drunken driving. Several of the governor's official family members have been arrested and convicted for the same offense.

If fidelity is an Idaho value, how come the Gem State has the nation's fifth highest divorce rate behind only Nevada, Arkansas, Wyoming and West Virginia?

If temperance is an Idaho value, how come we're busy polishing off enough booze to chalk up a gallon of beer, nearly a gallon of wine and three-quarters of a gallon of liquor for every man and woman 14 and older?

So Otter has a DUI.

Bet you know someone who does, too.

Maybe it's you.

Every year, according to Mothers Against Drunk Driving, 10,500 of us get convicted. How many more escape detection?

Winmill worked hard. He got an education. He made something of himself. Good for him.

Most of us blow off college.

Idaho is 14th from the bottom in the slice of its work force - 26.5 percent - with a four-year degree.

It's seventh from the bottom in terms of the share of its people - 7.1 percent - who like Winmill got a professional degree.

This is the place with the largest sliver of its workers earning the minimum wage, where you'd have to move to Mississippi to make anything less and where call centers are heralded as engines of economic growth.

We're not exactly jazzed about low pay, but we settle for it.

Harumph. Harumph, said columnist Chris Carlson.

Otter wouldn't know an Idaho value if it kicked him in the butt, he wrote Sunday. Otter would rather cut school spending, spread tax goodies to his corporate cronies, trash the environment and "plays footsie with the Tea Party," Carlson argued.

By contrast, Winmill's tenure has been the epitome of independence and reason.

When the evidence warranted it, for example, he imposed the death sentence against child molester and murderer James Edward Wood. When new evidence surfaced, he exonerated death row inmate Charles Fain.

Otter, on the other hand, camped out at a posh resort at Maui for five days in 2011 as the state readied to execute Paul Ezra Rhoades.

In fact, Otter's problem with Winmill is the judge's independence. Otter has been cooped up in his corporate boardroom for so long he no longer sees any difference between GOP values and Idaho values.

But if Otter's wrong - and Idahoans truly do respect probity, effort, reason and logic - why have voters rewarded this under-achiever and sloganeer with one election victory after another?

Go ahead. Aspire all you want. Admire Judge Winmill's values.

But look in the mirror, Idaho. That grinning mug you see?

It's Gov. Otter's.- M.T.