

# With voters like these, why bother running?

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

It's that time of year again.

Idaho's candidate filing deadline closed Friday.

So let us complain about how the Idaho Democratic Party let us voters down.

About how the minority party failed to put up candidates in about half of Idaho's 35 state Senate races.

About how almost 40 percent of the 70 House seats will feature no Democratic candidate this year.

(Ironically, north central Idaho can't make that claim. Democrats fielded candidates in all nine races in Districts 5, 6 and 7; the GOP came up with eight and fell short in District 6 when Jim Evans of Lenore withdrew late Friday, leaving Rep. John Rusche, D-Lewiston, unopposed for re-election.)

When you boil it down, no more than 15 seats statewide will be decided in the Nov. 4 general election.

Yet again, Democrats concentrated on filling the marquee races at the top of the ticket - nearly all of which will go down in flames - rather than rebuilding their brand from the ground up by focusing on county courthouse races and legislative seats.

Pretty much leaves us with a GOP-dominated Legislature, doesn't it?

Which means that the May 20 Republican primary is the state's de facto election.

Again.

The 145,000 or so party loyalists who will vote in that closed GOP primary are more conservative, more ideologically driven and more doctrinaire than the 458,000 or so people who vote in a general election.

That's how we get litmus tests deciding who's a true Republican and who is masquerading as one.

That's why legislators pass laws allowing college students to carry concealed handguns to class - even though they must know better.

It's why people on the margins practically begging for their civil rights can't even get an audience with this Legislature.

And it's why education funding - supposedly the one thing most Idahoans care deeply about - almost always seems to take a back seat to any tax cutting scheme that catches the GOP's fancy.

Frankly, however, the time to blame Idaho Democrats for all this was about 20 years ago when they still were players in the game.

Since then, not much has changed.

No matter what Democrats have done.

If they run hard, they cede about 80 percent of the Legislature to the Republicans.

If they sit back, they end up losing about 80 percent of the Legislature.

In 1995, Republicans held 27 of the 35 Senate seats. Today, they hold 28 seats.

Back then, the GOP controlled 57 House seats, the same number they have today.

Whether a Democratic candidate wears out a pair of shoes courting voters, spends a pile of money on advertising and issues a slew of well thought-out position papers doesn't seem to matter much. She's going to get about the same share of the vote as does the Democratic placeholder who takes what's coming to her - about 40 percent, maybe 45 percent if she's lucky.

Who would want to sign up for that?

No, it's not the Democrats' fault.

Not in a state where so many of us have dropped out. A generation ago, 52 percent of Idaho's voting-age population participated in the mid-term elections. The last mid-term, in 2010, saw that turnout drop to 40 percent.

Not in a state where so many people put their voting on autopilot. Of the state's 35 legislative districts, only three - Legislative District 5 in Latah and Benewah counties, District 6 in Nez Perce and Lewis counties and District 26 in Blaine, Camas, Gooding and Lincoln counties - actually show some discretion by electing people from both parties.

Everywhere else, it's less about gathering information and choosing the best person.

Everywhere else, it's more about voting the straight party line.

Everywhere else, it's about responding to emotional appeals - God, gays, guns and wolves - or the Obama Derangement Syndrome, which is the current version of the Clinton Derangement

Syndrome of the '90s, which itself was the followup to the Carter Derangement Syndrome of the '70s.

And you wonder how we've wound up with government that is out of touch and out of reach. -  
M.T.