

# Who were the real Republicans? Who cares?

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

For at least a year, maybe two, Idaho's governing party has been engaged in the political equivalent of navel gazing.

Can a real Republican vote for a state-based health insurance exchange?

Must he insist that the Common Core curriculum revamp will trigger the next educational apocalypse?

Must a real Republican get an ulcer about investing Idaho's endowment dollars in downtown Boise commercial real estate?

Are the only true Republicans those who believe the 17th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution - which brought direct election of U.S. senators - as well as every innovation since William McKinley was assassinated including the Federal Reserve, the Square Deal, the New Deal, the Fair Deal, New Frontier and the Great Society were mistakes?

Now we know. Tuesday's primary election settled the skirmish - at least for now. But the debris field of the war for the "heart and soul" of the Idaho GOP is strewn with the signs of neglect.

The bottom fell out of our public schools. Rather than restore Great Recession-era cuts, Idaho chose to cut taxes. Idaho spends less per student than all but one state. The share of its personal income devoted to public education has been cut 25 percent since Bill Clinton left the White House. To stem the bleeding, local taxpayers who can afford it shell out supplemental property taxes. Meanwhile, students are paying fees on everything from sports to lab classes.

Idaho's constitution mandates schools that are:

- "General" - In other words, they meet the education standard of the day.
- "Uniform" - No huge gaps between the haves and have-nots are allowed.
- "Thorough" - How thorough can you be on a four-day week?
- "Public" - So far, so good.
- "Free" - Ask parents how much getting their children started in school each fall costs them.

One out of five? Is that the best Idaho can do?

Idaho got poor. Only one state has a higher share of minimum wage jobs. Only one state has lower per capita incomes. The growing income gap between Idaho and the nation has cost each person in this state about \$2,248.

They call it the Idaho economic death spiral. How do we get off?

Idaho has thrown up barrier after obstacle in the path of young people looking to get a college education. Only three states - Louisiana, Massachusetts and South Dakota - slashed higher education more deeply. To make up some of the difference, Idaho boosted student tuition. The result: Student debt is rising and the state is ranked dead last in the percentage of high school graduates who go directly on to college.

By the way, only 21 percent of young Idahoans have a college degree - about a third where it needs to be.

What about the issues Idaho's leadership let slide in the name of political expediency:

A transportation budget so anemic that it falls \$262 million short every year of keeping the roads from cracking up and the bridges from falling down.

A health care system that promises treatment to low-income adults in the most expensive and least effective way possible. Taking the federal government up on its offer to extend Medicaid to about 100,000 needy adults would save taxpayers up to \$80 million a year and possibly spare 600 lives in the process.

A human rights law that tolerates overt discrimination against gays, lesbians, bisexuals and the transgendered on the job, in housing and in public accommodations. For eight years, lawmakers have been stonewalling this issue. Do they plan to stonewall eight more?

Boys and girls, Tea Party and establishment alike: The fight's over

How about making state government function again? - M.T.