

# Nothing says divorce like going to court

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

About eight years ago, libertarians, Tea Partiers and people who thought Ron Paul would make a wonderful president married into the Idaho Republican Party.

As with many unions, each side thought it could change the other - to no avail.

So it became a test of wills.

A party chairmanship here.

A battle over closing the primary election to all but registered Republicans there.

Punctuated by ceaseless rounds of bickering during primary election challenges.

Then came the equivalent of a wife blowing a fuse while her husband sat through a double-header on their anniversary - a dysfunctional state convention at Moscow where the spouses couldn't agree on electing a chairman and adopting a platform.

So finally, it came.

After years of hanging in there for the kids, they're splitting the sheets.

Last week, one spouse - embattled GOP Chairman Barry Peterson and his team, including local regional representative LeeAnn Callear of Clearwater County, defeated 2nd Congressional District challenger Bryan Smith and defeated attorney general candidate Christ Troupis - sued the other - including National Committeewoman Cindy Siddoway and 1st Vice Chairman Mike Mathews, who are proxies for Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter, state GOP lawyer Jason Risch and the establishment wing of the GOP.

At issue was the state convention in Moscow where, in the absence of any election of officers, Peterson claimed to retain his title.

Mathews has called an Aug. 2 meeting of the state central committee to elect a new chairman.

Peterson wants to stop him and convene the meeting a week later.

Like any marriage, once the divorce papers are filed, the bonds between the two spouses are dissolved. Essentially, they're fighting over who gets the Mercedes, the keys to the house and custody of the kids:

- Scenario 1: Peterson wins. The Aug. 2 meeting is canceled. When the group meets on Aug. 9, it follows an agenda Peterson set - which bolsters his chances to remain at the helm.

Then what?

Mathews, Siddoway, Otter and other establishment GOP members appeal, challenging Peterson's legitimacy and his authority to write checks on the party's bank account.

National GOP officials - who already have sided against Peterson - shut off the financial pipeline to Idaho Republican candidates.

And many of the people who won the Republican nomination in the May primary will find themselves alienated from the team in charge of the party structure.

- Scenario 2: Mathews, Siddoway (and Otter) prevail. The central committee gathers Aug. 2. Unimpeded by Peterson's agenda, they call for an election of officers. Presumably they have the votes to name party leadership in sync with the governor for the first time since GOP activists dumped Kirk Sullivan six years ago.

Then what?

Disgruntled Republican activists who are privately bad-mouthing Otter take to hurling grenades at him in public.

The insurrection plays out at local party barbecues, central committee meetings and regional networks still controlled by Peterson's allies.

The court decision gets appealed.

No matter who wins the lawsuit, you can bet on this much: They'll be so busy fighting each other they won't have much time to take on Idaho's beleaguered Democrats.

Once these two spouses leave the courthouse, they're moving into separate quarters. - M.T.