

# Constitution Party rejects own candidate for governor

*Party chairman says Steve Pankey's stance on gay marriage goes against party's values*

**William L. Spence/Lewiston Tribune**

Two months after the Idaho Republican Party's state convention ended in a dispute over party leadership, the Constitution Party of Idaho went one better by rejecting its own gubernatorial candidate.

At the party's recent state convention in Cascade, delegates voted against endorsing Steve Pankey for governor.

Pankey, 63, describes himself as a celibate, born-again Christian and Idaho's first openly gay gubernatorial candidate. He lives in Shoshone and has his own property management business, managing commercial properties in Idaho and California.

He ran for Lincoln County sheriff as a Constitution Party candidate in 2008, then ran for lieutenant governor as a Republican in 2010. He shifted back to the Constitution Party earlier this year when he filed to run for governor.

Constitution Party Chairman Floyd Whitley of Cottonwood said the endorsement flap stemmed from a letter Pankey wrote to Attorney General Lawrence Wasden in May, urging him to accept a federal court ruling overturning Idaho's ban on same-sex marriage.

The letter expressed Pankey's support for same-sex marriage, while clarifying his opposition to "special treatment" for gays and lesbians, such as adding language to the Idaho Human Rights Act that makes it illegal to discriminate against them in jobs or housing.

"His advocacy of homosexual marriage goes against everything the Constitution Party stands for," Whitley said. "Many delegates were really very upset with him."

Pankey said he was surprised by the reaction, but thinks it may actually benefit his campaign.

"I see it as a boost," he said. "They're so hard right-wing, it makes me look good."

Pankey said he's a Constitution Party member because he's fiscally conservative and supports limited government. On social issues, however, he leans toward the Libertarian Party.

"As long as you're willing to take personal responsibility and it doesn't hurt anyone else, you're actions are up to you," he said. "With marijuana, I think it should be legalized, regulated and taxed. Abortion should be at-will initially, then tougher after 20 weeks."

As for same-sex marriage, Pankey said, the voters he's talked with are more concerned about jobs and education than with the sexual orientation of the couple next door.

"I think Idahoans are interested in other issues," he said.

Whitley and Pankey traded several barbs about what went on during the convention.

Whitley said Pankey denied writing the Wasden letter and then made a series of "wild, false and libelous accusations" that disturbed delegates more than his support of same-sex marriage.

In a telephone interview, Pankey acknowledged writing the letter, but first noted there was an exorcist at the convention who offered to do an exorcism on him.

"That was probably the most dramatic thing that happened," he said.

About 15 people attended the convention, including eight voting delegates.

"Frankly, it was a waste of time," Pankey said. "It was really goofy. If I had it to do over, I'd run as a Republican or as an independent."

Nevertheless, he'll appear on the November ballot as a Constitution Party candidate, since the party's lack of endorsement means "absolutely nothing," said Chief Deputy Tim Hurst with the Idaho Secretary of State's Office.

"There are no (statutory) provisions for kicking someone out of a party," Hurst said. "There's no litmus test a candidate has to meet."

Whitley said the Constitution Party's national committeeman, who attended the Cascade convention, has written to Pankey and asked him to withdraw from the race. Should he do so, the party could appoint an alternate.

"The unfortunate thing is that our economic proposals and resolutions are being overshadowed by this frankly disgusting affair," he said.

Those proposals include restricting growth in state government to no more than the long-term, inflation-adjusted increase in gross state product - or about 2.9 percent - and adopting a low, flat-rate business tax for all Idaho industries.

"We're talking policies that are designed to return life to the interior of the state," Whitley said. "Under Republican policies - these so-called limited government folks - the rural counties in Idaho have been hemorrhaging population."

Pankey said he finds some of those policies unrealistic and "a big waste of time." His top priorities are education - including home schooling and opposing the Idaho Common Core standards - as well as jobs and veterans services.

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Spence may be contacted at [bspence@lmtribune.com](mailto:bspence@lmtribune.com) or (208) 791-9168.