

THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

Shortchanging Idaho Education

Supporters of better state support for public education, both K thru 12 and higher education, awoke the day after the election, to the stunning news that Jana Jones, a former deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction under Marilyn Howard, had lost the SPI race by some 5000 votes to Sherri Ybarra, a Mountain Home educator/administrator.

Ms. Ybarra had committed gaff after gaff, all disclosed in excruciating detail by *Spokesman Review* capitol reporter Betsy Russell. The mistakes ranged from outright plagiarism of information on her website taken from Jana Jones's website, to misleading reporters on how long she'd been in the state, how many marriages she had been in and her failure to vote in any election in the last ten years.

Yet, because she had the R behind her name, said little of substance during the election, generally avoided the press, and stayed away from State conventions like those held by a state's district superintendents and by school board directors, she won.

That conclusion begs to be restated, and those who know Idaho has to increase public support for education have every right to be angry about this: Jana Jones **lost** the election that was hers to lose for a variety of reasons. She should stand up and be accountable. She really let down those who have worked so hard for so many years to put education on a better footing.

It's not just that she ran a lousy campaign, she ran no campaign. She had just one person working with her and supposedly staffing the campaign. She refused to make fund-raising calls, even when friends like the former SPI, Marilyn Howard, would have her over, give her a list of people just waiting to hear from her before they opened their checkbooks, and she would still refuse to make the calls.

Despite this aversion to fund-raising she somehow collected and spent \$125,000 on her "campaign." Still, that was apparently five times more than the \$25,000 that Ms. Ybarra reports having spent. That has to be close to a modern day record in low spending per vote----about 11 and ½ cents per

vote. By comparison millionaire gubernatorial candidate A.J. Balukoff spent approximately \$16.00 per vote received.

Without any evidence, Ms. Jones apparently believed the National Education Association and the Idaho Education Association were going to step in and run an independent campaign for her election. She guessed wrong.

This may sound petty, but even supporters were non-plussed to see how uncombed her hair looked in the statewide televised debate. A photo of the debate that went over the wire made her literally look scatter-brained. There is ample evidence verifying a UCLA study that says 80% of a viewer's conclusion on who won a debate is related to appearance and non-verbal signals.

What they say is seldom a factor unless there is a real mistake. Ms. Ybarra understood the importance of visuals. Her hair was neat, she dressed with some "power red" in her attire and remained cool and calm. She won the encounter going away despite media coverage saying she had lost.

From the returns it is also apparent Ms. Jones must have spent most of her time campaigning in Ada County and several of the higher populated counties, and pretty much ignored the smaller counties. They reciprocated.

Especially galling was how few votes she garnered in the rural LDS dominated counties of southeastern Idaho given the fact she is LDS.

Ms. Jones did carry her home county of Bonneville, 56% to 44%, but lost Canyon County by the same 56 to 44 margin. Ms. Ybarra also carried her home county of Elmore 61% to 39%, but where she was able to offset Ms. Jones margins in most of the urban counties was in rural Idaho. There she consistently won by almost 2 to 1 margins and compiled numerous thousand votes margins.

In Bonner county, Ms. Ybarra ran up a 2500 vote margin and in the county which probably elected her, Kootenai, she almost doubled Ms. Jones vote, winning with a 9000 vote margin.

If there's any consolation, Ms. Jones did run ahead of Democratic gubernatorial nominee A.J. Balukoff in most of the rural counties, but he was one of six on that ballot as opposed to her head to head against Ybarra.

The most significant number was the drop-off vote between the top Republican vote receiver on the ballot, U.S Senator Jim Risch who received 285,358 and the number of Republican votes Ms. Ybarra garnered---217,035.

That's a difference of 68,323 votes. One might call that the possible number of well-informed Republicans and Independents who, knowing that Ms. Ybarra was a very flawed candidate, still could not bring themselves to vote for Ms. Jones. Given her non-campaign, can you really blame them?