

# Donald Trump's Idaho?

**Randy Stapilus/Ridenbaugh Press**

Is Idaho Donald Trump's kind of place?

We now have a pretty clear idea of who all the major contenders for president will be in 2016: At this point all or nearly all have announced. (The New York Times declared the field unofficially closed after the announcement last week of Ohio Governor John Kasich.)

So who's the Republican now most likely to pick up support in the Gem State?

The last couple of nomination contests weren't good normal case studies, because Mitt Romney had unusually strongly connections to the Idaho area, between his ties to Utah and his Mormon religion, which he has in common with about a third of Idahoans, the bulk of that third being Republican.

Romney aside, the hearts of many Idaho Republicans seem traditionally to go toward insurgent and anti-establishment contenders, and candidates who match up with the Idaho self-image.

The biggest share of those Idaho Republicans who didn't back Romney in the nomination fight in 2012 went for Ron Paul, whose candidacy was an irritant to much of the establishment. In 2000, there wasn't really an insurgent candidate. George W. Bush got much of the state's support and was the big favorite nationally from early on, but there was a significant base for Alan Keyes as well. In 1996, Pat Buchanan was the closest thing around to an insurgent anti-establishing candidate, but he never organized substantially in Idaho, and never picked up a lot of national traction.

When Ronald Reagan, still probably as popular in Idaho as he ever was, got his start, he was an insurgent candidate, running from a long-shot mode in 1968 and as a serious but definitely outsider challenger to a sitting president in 1976. And Reagan won that 1976 Idaho primary hugely, with 74.3% of the vote, his best vote anywhere in the country that year. A lot of the affection for him in Idaho built from that time, from his role not as a front runner or incumbent but as a challenger to powers that be.

Also liked: Challenger to powers that be who are dismissed by them. People like Helen Chenoweth and Sarah Palin picked up a lot of traction in Idaho in no small part for that reason. Their backers might call it being unafraid to speak the truth, their critics might call it speaking foolishness, but in Idaho you'll find enough voters in the first camp to form a significant base.

Does Donald Trump fit into that mold? Or does someone else do so better?

Reagan had been a governor, but many of the people who like Trump say that much of what they like about him is that he's an outsider, so presumably someone who hasn't been a governor or a senator might have some particular appeal. They also like the idea that he "can't be bought," that he's independently wealthy enough that he could do as he chooses. These concepts would have some resonance in the Idaho Republican electorate. Across that very large Republican field of candidates, only three, Trump, Ben Carson and Carly Fiorina, have not been either a governor or a senator. And Carson and Fiorina are not top-rank contenders, at least at present.

And this time there aren't any Republican candidates who touch the self-identity chords in Idaho the way Reagan, George W. Bush or Mitt Romney did.

Might Idaho be Trump territory? Could be, if The Donald lasts in his campaigning hothouse long enough to get to next year's Idaho primary.

-----

***Randy Stapilus is a former Idaho newspaper reporter and editor, author of *The Idaho Political Field Guide*, edits the *Idaho Weekly Briefing*, and blogs at [www.ridenbaugh.com](http://www.ridenbaugh.com). He can be reached at [stapilus@ridenbaugh.com](mailto:stapilus@ridenbaugh.com). A book of his Idaho columns from the past decade, *Crossing the Snake*, will be available in a few weeks.***