

Will Idaho ever change?

Idaho State Journal Editorial Board

A recent Idaho Politics Weekly poll of how Idahoans view their government and its leadership showed there is some tangible dissatisfaction among our state's citizenry.

What that means moving forward is hard to say because Gem State residents seem very opposed these days to voting newcomers into office and for the most part have no interest in electing Democrats.

The elected official who scored best in the poll was Sen. Mike Crapo, but it's doubtful he'll be bragging about his 51 percent approval rating.

Crapo, R-Idaho Falls, had a 28 percent unfavorable rating, and 21 percent of those surveyed had no opinion of him.

His Senate counterpart, Jim Risch, R-Boise, had an even higher no-opinion rating of 27 percent. Risch's favorable rating was 46 percent and his unfavorable was 29 percent.

In the U.S. House, the survey respondents gave Rep. Raul Labrador, R-Eagle, a 45 percent approval rating, while 33 percent said they disapproved of him and 21 percent had no opinion. Longtime Idaho politician Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho Falls, received the second highest favorable rating in the survey, 49 percent. His disapproval rating was 33 percent while 19 percent of respondents had no opinion of him.

Idahoans' approval ratings of Congress overall are much higher than what's seen on the national level. Respondents to the Idaho Politics Weekly survey gave the U.S. Senate a 30 percent favorable rating and 56 percent unfavorable while the U.S. House received a 35 percent favorable and 53 percent unfavorable. Nationwide polls show that Americans' approval ratings of Congress are in the teens while the disapproval ratings are typically above 75 percent.

Our governor, C.L. "Butch" Otter, received by far the highest disapproval rating among Idaho elected officials in the survey — 43 percent, just below his 46 percent approval rating. He also received the lowest no-opinion rating among state officials in the survey — 12 percent.

Other takeaways from the survey include that nearly 7 in 10 Idahoans have an unfavorable opinion of President Barack Obama while 28 percent gave the president favorable marks (no surprises there).

The Idaho Politics Weekly survey showed that state Attorney General Lawrence Wasden had a 40 percent approval rating, a survey-low 15 percent disapproval rating and a survey-high 45 percent no-opinion rating.

If anything is striking about the survey of 610 Idahoans for Idaho Politics Weekly by Dan Jones & Associates, it's the number of respondents who had no opinion about their leaders.

Do the many no-opinion responses indicate a lack of knowledge?

When nearly half of survey respondents say they have no opinion on the state attorney general, does it mean they have no idea who Wasden is and what he does?

What does it say about our state when significant percentages of our residents have no opinion on their top leaders?

We can come up with a lot of reasons for that, but the one we're betting on is that many Idahoans have no clue who represents them.

Another matter revealed by the poll is our governor's dismal numbers. Other than the president, Otter polled the worst of anyone. But every time Otter's been up for re-election, he's clobbered his Democratic opposition.

Perhaps it's because Idahoans don't think much of Otter but consider him a better alternative than anyone from the left.

One would think a red state like Idaho would see significant support for our all-Republican team of leaders. The fact that Crapo's 51 percent approval rating led the pack shows there's a palpable level of dissatisfaction out there.

In any other state, such mediocre approval ratings would open the door to new blood being elected.

But we all know that simply isn't the case in Idaho.

For some reason, Idahoans continue to return the same people to office — at least that's the trend in recent years.

It makes us wonder how poorly Idaho will have to sink in terms of its economy, education system and overall reputation before voters here decide to support someone new.

We'd like to think Idaho's population is smart enough to eventually realize change is needed.