

THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

Luke Malek Does It Correctly

Every once in a while I see something that restores my faith in democracy. I witnessed such last week in Coeur d'Alene when I attended State Representative Luke Malek's town hall meeting held at a Coeur d'Alene Fire Station.

Over 60 people were present, many standing in the too small conference room. A Malek aide said they had expected 10 people, based on a previous meeting, and were as surprised as any one.

Remarkable to this observer was not one word was heard regarding national issues, whether immigration reform, or President Obama Middle East strategy, or presidential preferences.

To top everything off, it was all civil. People listened respectfully and though one or two folks briefly mounted soap boxes to vent about a personal issue. Even this was short and sweet with the speaker showing sensitivity to time. All this is a tribute to Malek, a young attorney who though a solid conservative has been challenged and is being challenged again by the Republican's Tea Party faction.

To these wingnuts because Malek does not decide issues on their narrow ideological view of the world but rather listens to people and tries to solve problems, he is a RINO (Republican in Name Only) and has to be replaced with one of their own.

To some observers, of the the three state senators and six state representatives who represent Kootenai county in the Legislature, Malek is the only one that has a lick of common sense and dares to speak forthrightly. Under the GOP-instituted closed primary moderates like Malek are vulnerable to a challenge by the hard-line right wing because they do get their voters out in the primary.

Last time around Malek won his primary by 187 votes. This time around he is being challenged by another Coeur d'Alene attorney much more to the liking of the Tea Party. Others being targeted for removal in the primary in north Idaho include ten-term State Senator Shawn Keough who twice

rebuffed primary challenges from Danielle Ahrens, whose campaigns were run by now State Representative Heather Scott. Both represent District 1 and Senator Keough is now co-chair of the powerful Joint Finance and Appropriations Committee.

In district five the “Constitutionalists” in the Tea Party are putting a challenger up against first term State Representative Caroline Nilsson Troy, another intelligent, conservative who is not conservative enough.

Malek has many admirable traits but in particular his candor stands out. In his brief opening remarks he explained how he had changed positions on the Horse Racing issue and voted to over-ride Governor Otter’s veto once he recognized the televised “historical horse races” were remarkably close to slot machines.

He told the audience more funding for education would be a top priority. He admitted he had not read the Washington Supreme Court ruling overturning state support for charter schools and said he was sure if there was a basis to challenge charter schools in Idaho someone would do it,

He said the Coeur d’Alene Charter School was one of the best examples of how charter schools could work. He conceded a bias based on his own home school education (until his last year of high school when he attended and graduated from Spokane’s Gonzaga Prep.).

Asked by an obvious supporter of an unrestricted second amendment proponent as to whether he would sponsor or support a “constitutional carry” law, Maledk replied with a firm no, not at this time.

He explained that while he had concealed weapon permits issued by Idaho and Utah he nonetheless felt that it was not needed nor until society got a better handle on how to keep firearms out of the hands of the mentally ill should the subject be raised.

He easily fielded and answered questions concerning a variety of local issues, from Coeur d’Alene’s new crisis center, to a push for a sales tax reduction on food, to oversight of the State’s judiciary, to delivering broadband to Idaho school districts, to Medicaid expansion.

It was a fine example of a solid legislator working to keep his constituents well informed. Here's hoping they know how lucky they are.