

# Doze through this primary and you'll regret it

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

If you're not careful, Idaho's May 17 primary election could lull you to sleep.

Turnout generally is abysmal. Anywhere from 16 to 18 percent of Idaho's eligible voters bother to show up.

This election is the second Idaho GOP primary in 10 weeks. Back on March 8, 227,000 Idaho Republicans cast their preference for the GOP presidential nomination. Who knows how many voters will be burned out?

Two years ago, Republicans had two slates of candidates, from the top of the ticket to bottom - representing a choice between a right-wing insurgency and the center-right establishment. Some called it a contest for "the heart and soul" of the party.

You won't find many marquee races this time. Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, has no GOP primary opponent. Congressmen Raul Labrador and Mike Simpson have only token opposition within their own parties.

That leaves Idaho's 105 legislative seats.

As of now, start with 15 of Idaho's 35 state senators - 12 Republicans and three Democrats - who face no challenger.

Next add 14 House members - 11 Republicans and three Democrats - also without opposition.

Then mix in the two Senate seats and 14 House positions that will be decided in the Republican primary because no Democrat has signed up for those seats.

No Republican has filed to run for one Democratic House seat.

Both parties are contesting the six legislative seats representing Benewah, Latah, Lewis and Nez Perce counties, so those races will be decided in November. There is one Republican primary contest where voters will choose between Carl Berglund of Kendrick and Bill Goesling of Moscow for the right to face Rep. Paulette Jordan, D-Plummer, in the fall.

In the sprawling 7th Legislative District, which includes Bonner, Clearwater, Idaho and Shoshone counties, the GOP primary looms larger. Carl Crabtree of Grangeville is challenging Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood. Priscilla Giddings of White Bird faces Rep. Shannon McMillan, R-Silverton. And Kris Steneck of Elk City is opposing Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins.

Democrat Ken Meyers of Sagle will face the winner of the Crabtree-Nuxoll contest. Whoever emerges from the Giddings-McMillan race will oppose Democrat Jessica Chilcott of Sandpoint in November.

No Democrat has filed for the seat Shepherd now holds.

Bottom line: The GOP will remain in charge of Idaho's Legislature. The only question is which group of Republicans.

With all that said, there's a great deal hanging in the balance:

- Budget committee - Both co-chairwomen - Sen. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint, and Rep. Maxine Bell, R-Jerome - are being challenged from the right wing of the GOP. Other panel members facing conservative opposition are Reps. Luke Malek, R-Coeur d'Alene, and Wendy Horman, R-Idaho Falls.
- Momentum - The Idaho Freedom Foundation made a hero of Rep. Ron Nate, R-Rexburg, by giving him its highest voting grade. He's being challenged from the center by Madison County Republican Party Chairman Doug Ricks of Rexburg.

In contrast, the conservative organization is at war with Rep. Kelley Packer, R-McCammon. Jason West of Pocatello is taking her on.

- Leadership - Most of the GOP contests pit a centrist incumbent against a conservative challenger - although there are a few right-wing incumbents who face opposition from the middle.

It won't take much to alter the equilibrium, especially in the House, where nearly four years ago, Speaker Scott Bedke, R-Oakley, ousted his predecessor, former Rep. - and now Secretary of State Lawrence "Boss" Denney, R-Midvale - by a narrow margin.

Bedke's election heralded a moderation in the House. The most notable example was the passage of the state-based health insurance exchange in 2013. As well, you've also seen modest success in rebuilding the state's highway and bridge network and a respectable increase in support for public education.

Reverse that trend and you're likely to see:

- More erosion in Idaho's tax base.
- Less spending for public education.
- A halt in Idaho's fledgling steps toward extending a helping hand to the 78,000 working-poor Idaho adults who can't afford private health insurance.
- An escalation in the culture wars - from more aggressive assaults on abortion rights to turning a deaf ear toward banning discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Snooze through this campaign and you will wake up sorrier for it. - M.T.