

Turnabout Wayne Hoffman Idaho Freedom Index exposes fraudulent Republicans

Wayne Hoffman/Idaho Freedom Foundation

Here's the truth that opinion writer Marty Trillhaase hasn't told you. Idaho Freedom Foundation has just one client: Freedom. We don't work for special interests. We don't work to advance any agenda except for the one that results in more freedom and liberty for all Idaho businesses, individuals and families.

So, be wary when Trillhaase offers praise to Sen. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint, and Rep. Luke Malek, R-Coeur d'Alene, as well as other poor performers on the Idaho Freedom Index. Says Trillhaase: "If they're not doing IFF's bidding, it means they might be doing yours."

Quite the contrary.

Both Keough and Malek - along with many other legislators who routinely vote for more government, more regulation and higher taxes - aren't doing you any favors. They're costing you more money. They're restraining economic growth, rewarding special interest groups and allowing cronyism to prevail.

Serving your interests? Trillhaase might have a point - if leaving you poorer, with fewer opportunities to get ahead and stay ahead serves your interests. I tend to think it doesn't.

For the 20-plus years that I've been following, covering and watchdogging Idaho politics, I've marveled at the narrative that Idaho's Legislature is the most conservative in the country.

False.

Idaho is certainly among the most Republican of states. But conservative? Not even close.

The disconnect comes from members of the media insisting that "conservative" is just a synonym for "Republican" and vice versa.

Intentionally or innocently, the "conservative" label is a misnomer that serves to confuse voters. Indeed, the media's mistaken viewpoint of conservatism works really, really well if you happen to be a Republican who often votes in support of Big Government programs - but you'd rather your constituents didn't know it.

Over the past two years alone, legislators who swear allegiance to conservative values have voted to raise taxes, add new government regulations and promote government-run health care. I've even listened to lawmakers justify their votes to tell auto dealers what hours they must be open, and justify telling bars how many drinks they must serve (I wish I were making that up).

These thinly veiled small-government legislators return home to wave the conservative banner. They hope none dare challenge their rhetoric. But just in case, the veiled ones always come armed with a good reason for the exception to overtake the conservative rule.

This ongoing and purposeful deception is the reason the Idaho Freedom Foundation created the Freedom Index. IFF grew tired of seeing moderate and liberal legislators being hailed in the media and in their own campaign literature as conservatives, while actual conservatives were being put down and derided as extremists or fringe.

The Freedom Index looks at every single bill introduced in the Legislature, determines whether it grows government or shrinks it, raises a tax or lowers it, supports special interests or the free market. The results are then compiled so lawmakers and the general public can have a deeper understanding of legislative action taken per bill and on a cumulative level.

The results for the last several years have been interesting: Generally, legislators in Idaho - Republican and Democrat - support ever-increasing levels of government intervention in the marketplace, in our businesses, in our personal lives.

There are, in fact, too few legislators in Idaho who support limited government and personal responsibility, which are core conservative principles. Lawmakers who decidedly upheld such principles in 2016, earning a Freedom Index C or better from this area are Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll, R-Cottonwood, and Rep. Shannon McMillan, R-Silverton, (who both brought home "A" scores) and Rep. Paul Shepherd, R-Riggins,

who had a C.

On the flip side are Sen. Dan Johnson, R-Lewiston, a Republican who scored a D-, while Democrats John Rusche and Dan Rudolph, both House members from Lewiston, walked away with an F- apiece. (Rusche has been bragging on social media about his F-).

Labor unions, government employees, special interest groups, and federal edicts always pressure Idaho lawmakers to grow government at the expense of free enterprise and freedom. And for too long, a majority of Idaho legislators have sided with the liberal agenda.

The Freedom Index lets you know who truly is on your side, who supports your freedom to keep more of what you earn and to reach the goals you have set for yourself, your family and your business.

Hoffman is president of the Idaho Freedom Foundation.