

# Hoffman: Conservatives win in May election

## **Wayne Hoffman, Idaho Freedom Foundation/Action**

Here's the truth about the May 17 Republican elections that the legacy media in Idaho doesn't know -- or doesn't want you to know: Conservatives came out on top in legislative contests throughout Idaho. And, without question, regardless of what happens in November, Idaho will have a more conservative Legislature come 2017.

Moderate Republicans lost three races across the state: Reps. Rich Wills of Mountain Home, Merrill Beyeler of Leadore and Paul Romrell of St. Anthony, all fell to conservative challengers.

Conservatives also lost three elections: Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll of Cottonwood and Reps. Kathy Sims of Coeur d'Alene and Shannon McMillian of Silverton were defeated. But McMillian's challenger is anticipated to be as conservative as her. So that brings the net conservative losses to two. Additionally, conservatives scored a big win in eastern Idaho with the important open-seat election of Republican Bryan Zollinger. That victory reduces the losses in the conservative column to just one.

Rep. Pete Nielsen of Mountain Home also lost, but his record has been somewhat mixed lately, so the impact of his defeat goes in the question mark column. Either way, conservatives remain one or two votes ahead in the Legislature.

The other untold story of Tuesday's elections: Idahoans will find that legislative conservative voices are stronger, sharper and more geographically diverse. Prior to the 2014 election of Rep. Ron Nate, R-Rexburg, eastern Idaho boasted no conservative legislators. Now, it will have three. In southern Idaho, Dorothy Moon and Christy Zito are expected to be dynamic defenders of liberty and free markets, shifting the voting pattern to the right.

Karey Hanks, who bested Romrell, has also telegraphed an unswerving commitment to conservative principles and will likely align nicely with Nate.

That all said, the pundits in the Idaho media just can't bring themselves to tell you the truth that conservatives made significant headway Tuesday. The media will have you believe that every Republican in the Legislature is a conservative, and that this election was a contest between the Right and Far Right. That's bunk. One newspaper, in a single editorial, even described defeated middle-of-the-road legislators as both "conservative" and "conservative moderates," whatever that means.

Instead of being honest about this election, the Idaho media have focused on the effectiveness of the new Idaho Freedom Action's efforts to educate voters. Many in the media have noted that moderates, like Luke Malek of Coeur d'Alene and Kelley Packer of McCammon, survived.

Yet, the media pundits overlook (intentionally?) where moderates came away empty, and that includes Senate President Pro Tem Brent Hill, who sunk a lot of political capital into the unsuccessful bid to oust Nate in favor of a more moderate Doug Ricks. Hill also failed to bolster Wills' campaign. Likewise, with mixed results, Gov. Butch Otter spent a lot of energy to prop up moderate legislators and candidates.

As is known, politics is local. Voting records, interaction with constituents, geography and effectiveness, both in office and on the campaign trail, all factor into ballot box decisions. Contrary to what the Idaho media will have you believe, it's not all about one group, one vote or one ideology. Conservatives and moderates lost. The election, it turns out, cannot be couched as a referendum on ideology. But it can be couched for what it is: an election in which more conservatives than moderates will join the Legislature come January.

Yes, I hoped voters would see their way clear to elect even more conservative challengers to the Legislature, but they didn't. Tuesday night wasn't a disappointment, though. Far from it. Any suggestion to the contrary on the part of the media is journalistic malpractice.