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Editorial: Idaho voters don't go to extremes

Gary Crooks/SR

No doubt there is an American Redoubt festering in North Idaho, but there's considerable doubt that Idaho voters will go along with its retrograde agenda.

The Redoubt is populated with people who have pulled up stakes elsewhere and moved to Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, Eastern Washington and Eastern Oregon in search of like-minded people and "defensible space."

They view even small-government conservatives with suspicion and call them liberals.

At the same time: "Local GOP central committees also have swung to the right in Bonner and Kootenai counties in recent years, pushing out more mainstream Republicans, and they have not swung back," reported Betsy Z. Russell in Sunday's Spokesman-Review.

So Tuesday's primary election results were refreshing, because ultraconservative candidates and officeholders were dealt a setback.

In Idaho, of course, an "R" by the name is practically mandatory for electoral success, so the significant battles are waged in the primaries, where "R" can stand for Reasonable or Reactionary. This also leads to "RINO"-hunting, where mainstream candidates are labeled "Republican in Name Only."

The Reasonables survived hits from various political action groups pushing the tea party/constitutionalist agenda. Two prime targets in the state Legislature, Sen. Shawn Keough of Sandpoint and Rep. Luke Malek of Coeur d'Alene, won their races.

Meanwhile, four of the seven incumbent legislators who lost are positioned on the far right, including Rep. Kathy Sims of Coeur d'Alene, Rep. Shannon McMillan of Silverton and Sen. Sheryl Nuxoll of Cottonwood.

In a closely watched race, Kootenai County Sheriff Ben Wolfinger easily dispatched the "constitutionalist sheriff" candidate John Green, who believes it's the sheriff's duty to decline to enforce federal laws deemed unconstitutional. That determination, of course, belongs with the courts, not sheriffs.

In another possible bellwether contest, Idaho County Commissioner Jim Chmelik lost his re-election bid. He previously ran for lieutenant governor in the hopes of using that position to proselytize about state and local governments taking over federal lands.

Chmelik has logged many miles in Idaho and Washington holding forth on the issue, but it would appear Idaho County voters prefer a commissioner who colors inside the job description.

Tuesday's results are healthy, because they show the electorate wants officeholders to concentrate on a reality-based agenda – one that focuses on improving schools and universities and rebuilding and maintaining roads to help boost the state's economic fortunes.

Perhaps it's a sign that voters will no longer reward candidates who disengage from these nuts-and-bolts issues. Perhaps voters are saying they want their leaders to do more than say "no" and campaign on fear.

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