

If Rusche is a socialist, Kingsley is a misogynist

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

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Bernie Sanders is a Democratic candidate for president.

He is a self-avowed socialist.

He has wild hair.

He wears glasses.

Lewiston Rep. John Rusche is a Democrat. He serves as his party's leader in the House.

Some might say he has wild hair.

He certainly wears glasses.

Therefore, Rusche "has all but declared himself a socialist."

So goes the Idaho Republican Party's tirade on Rusche. You can see it on Twitter @Idaho GOP - or just look at elsewhere on this page.

If you go on the GOP link, Republicans will provide no evidence supporting their charge - but they will ask you for money.

Guilt by association is an old, reliable tactic in a traditional red state where Democrats are held to account for their national party. For instance, any Democrat who stood for state or congressional office in the last quarter of the 20th century carried the weight of Sen. Teddy Kennedy on his back. Voting for an Idaho Democrat was the same as voting for the Massachusetts liberal, we were told.

More recently, voters have been encouraged to send President Obama a message by ousting the local Democratic county commissioner or clerk.

This time, however, you have to practically ignore reality.

Such as the fact that Sanders is no Democrat; Vermont sent him to Congress as an independent. He is running in the Democratic presidential campaign. But Hillary Clinton, not Sanders, will be the nominee.

Rusche hardly fits in Sanders' league. For one thing, he supported Clinton, not Sanders.

For another, Rusche is frequently to the right of his own House Democratic caucus. Most Democrats voted against allowing people to carry concealed weapons without a permit; Rusche voted yes.

Allowing children suffering from Dravet Syndrome to use cannabinoids was popular with some Republicans and most Democrats; Rusche opposed the measure - which Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter vetoed.

Most House Democrats voted against a memorial to Congress asking that the lower Snake River dams be preserved. Rusche and fellow Lewiston Democratic Rep. Dan Rudolph voted for that memorial.

In fact, Rusche's voting record is closer to some Idaho Republicans than his fellow Democrats. So says the conservative Idaho Freedom Foundation, which is hardly friendly to Rusche.

Its Freedom Index gives Rusche a 48 percent. Of the 21 Democratic legislators - only Rudolph and Sen. Grant Burgoyne of Boise rate higher. IFF scored them at 49 percent.

By contrast, IFF said Rusche was more conservative than a few Republicans, including Senate Majority Leader Bart Davis of Idaho Falls, who came in at 46 percent, or Rep. Fred Wood of Burley, who was rated at 45 percent.

And if you want to find someone to serve as the poster boy for Sanders' idea of socialized medicine - Medicare for all - the last guy you'd recruit for the job is Rusche.

He retired as senior vice president and chief medical officer for Regence BlueShield, a private health insurance company.

You'd also have a hard time selling Rusche on Sanders' idea of protectionism. Rusche is a free-trader.

But here's an idea: Two can play this guilt-by-association game. For instance:

Donald Trump is the presumptive Republican presidential nominee.

Trump talks like a misogynist.

He has contempt for prisoners of war.

He's been insensitive toward disabled people.

He has shown intolerance for Hispanics and Muslims.

At Park City, Utah, last week, Hewlett Packard CEO Meg Whitman - the GOP's candidate for California governor in 2010 - reportedly compared Trump to dictators such as Germany's Adolf Hitler and Italy's Benito Mussolini.

Rusche's general election opponent, Mike Kingsley, does not have Trump's comb-over.

But Kingsley is a Republican.

So by the GOP's same logic, Kingsley is intolerant of women and minorities. He doesn't have much use for prisoners of war. And he has some kind of affinity for tyrants.

If Kingsley doesn't like that tactic, he can always disavow what his party is saying about Rusche.

But with someone as unpopular as Trump heading his party's ticket this year, Kingsley can't have it both ways. - M.T.

