

Idaho opposed Trump and Clinton; now what?

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

When it comes to this week's Republican National Convention at Cleveland and the Democratic National Convention next week at Philadelphia, Idaho will be on the outside looking in.

As Corey Cook, dean of Boise State University's School of Public Service observed in the Idaho Statesman, only a handful of states can claim to have rejected both Republican Donald Trump and Democrat Hillary Clinton.

Among those joining Idaho on that list are Kansas, Maine, Minnesota, Utah and Wisconsin.

During their March 8 primary, Idaho Republicans seemed to be voting against Trump - especially in Mormon-dominated eastern Idaho. If the thrice-married Trump's lifestyle didn't alienate LDS voters, then his characterization of their faith as "alien" certainly did.

The result was a blow-out - 100,889 votes for Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, 62,413 for Trump.

Two weeks later at their caucuses, an overflow crowd packed the Democratic caucuses to vote for Sanders - who got 78 percent of the support from just about every corner of the state.

This is relatively rare stuff for Idahoans. They haven't been this out of step with both political parties since the 1976 presidential primary - when Democrats chose native son Sen. Frank Church over eventual nominee Jimmy Carter and Republicans went with Ronald Reagan instead of President Gerald Ford.

Since then, Idaho usually backed one if not both of the Republican and Democratic frontrunners - often because they had no choice. By the time Idaho got around to casting a vote in the May primary or the March caucuses, contests in other states had whittled the list of candidates to the ultimate winner.

This year, Idahoans spoke while the primary season was still unresolved.

Odds are Idaho will go to Trump this fall. The state has not given its four electoral votes to any Democrat since 1964.

Typically, presidential elections are good news for Idaho Republicans. Enthusiasm for the top of the ticket generates a wave of GOP voters, who tend to cast a straight ticket.

But given how unpopular Trump is with Idaho Republicans, you have to wonder what kind of effect his candidacy might have on the down-ballot races.

Nobody expects many surprises in the top tier. The three members of Idaho's all-Republican congressional delegation up for re-election - Sen. Mike Crapo and Congressmen Raul Labrador and Mike Simpson - should have no problems.

Their opponents - Jerry Sturgill of Boise, James Piotrowski of Boise and Jennifer Martinez of Boise, respectively, - got in late, have little money and not much name ID.

But it could get dicey in the few "purple" or competitive legislative seats up for grabs:

- Freshman state Rep. Caroline Nilsson Troy, R-Genesee, is challenged on the right by independent candidate Ken B. De Vries of St. Maries and from the left by Moscow Democrat Laurene Sorensen.

Two years ago, Troy won her seat by 606 votes.

- In 2014, state Rep. John Rusche, D-Lewiston, held on to defeat Republican Mike Kingsley by 48 voters. Democrat Dan Rudolph deposed former state Rep. Thyra Stevenson, R-Lewiston, by 26 votes.

Kingsley's back for a rematch.

So is Stevenson, although Rudolph isn't. Lewiston City Councilor Bob Blakey is seeking the seat as a Democrat.

- Much of Boise's legislative map already is held by Democrats and the GOP margin of victory in that city's Legislative District 15 has been slipping. For instance, state Rep. Lynn Luker, R-Boise, retained his seat against Democrat Steve Berch by a 416-vote margin.

Berch is back for a rematch.

- Two-term Rep. Steven Miller, R-Fairfield, won re-election in 2014 by 126 votes over Democrat Richard Fosbury. This year, he's facing Democrat Kathleen J. Eder of Hailey.

It may come down to this: Will the presidential campaign merely depress the Idaho voter - who will shrug off his antipathy for the presidential candidates but glumly turn out to support other Republican candidates?

Or will it so discourage voters that more Republicans throw up their hands and stay home - helping Democrats in the margins?

You can bet that scenario will leave more than a handful of candidates biting their nails. - M.T.