

When half the class flunks, grade on the curve

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

The Idaho Freedom Foundation's Wayne Hoffman flunked nearly half of the Idaho Legislature.

So can you blame Rep. John Rusche, D-Lewiston, for grading on the curve?

Locked in a tight re-election battle with Republican Mike Kingsley, Rusche is reminding constituents that his voting record is not much different than many, if not most, of the GOP lawmakers - at least according to Hoffman's Freedom Index.

Sure, Rusche got an "F."

As did all 14 House Democrats and all seven Democrats in the Senate.

So did 13 of the 28 Senate Republicans.

And 15 of the 56 House Republicans.

That put Rusche in the same category as House Speaker Scott Bedke, R- Oakley, President Pro Tem Brent Hill, R-Rexburg, the co-chairwomen of the Legislature's budget-writing committee, Sen. Shawn

Keough, R-Sandpoint, and Rep. Maxine Bell, R-Jerome, as well as Sen. Curt McKenzie, R-Nampa, who is his party's hope for the Idaho Supreme Court.

In fact, Rusche's numerical score of 48 percent was higher than all but three Democrats and bested such Republicans as Senate Majority Leader Bart Davis, R-Idaho Falls, and House Health and Welfare Committee Chairman Fred Wood, R-Burley.

So the Lewiston Democrat was all-too-happy to report these results in a campaign flyer: "The conservative Idaho Freedom Foundation rates John Rusche as the third most conservative Democrat in the Idaho Legislature. Even more conservative than some Republicans."

Hoffman begs to differ.

"He's trying to assert that we've validated his conservativeness, which is not true," Hoffman says.

To be precise, Professor Hoffman gave Rusche an F-minus, while some of his GOP colleagues eked out an F-plus.

Some would call that a distinction without a difference.

Besides, Rusche also has a voting record that looks more like a sober Republican than a wild-eyed liberal.

Rusche voted to lower business taxes.

A liberal would vote to raise them.

Rusche voted to ease restrictions on people carrying concealed weapons.

Wouldn't a liberal prefer imposing universal background checks instead?

Rusche voted against allowing parents whose children suffer from debilitating seizures to use cannabidiol, a derivative of marijuana.

Any liberal worth the label would be calling for legalization.

The minute Hoffman's organization painted establishment Republicans and Democrats with the same broad brush, it gave Rusche his opening.

About the only people who came away with high grades were members of the Confederate wing of the Idaho GOP - such as Rep. Heather Scott, R-Blanchard, Rep. Ron Nate, R-Rexburg, and Sen. Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene.

The fact is there are only a handful of liberals still roaming around the entire Gem State.

One of them was recently sighted riding in a limousine outside the Sun Valley Lodge.

Another was spotted sipping a latte in Boise's North End.

And there are rumors of yet a third seen downing a glass of chardonnay near the University of Idaho campus.

But the last place you're going to find one of these rare birds is under the state Capitol dome. - M.T.