

The lie Idaho's GOP believes, the truth it obscures

Marty Trillhaase The Lewiston Tribune | [3 comments](#)

Accuse Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter of selling the state out to the Chinese and people will believe it.

Tell them the governor puts big corporations and special interests at the front of the line, however, and they're incredulous.

What would you call people who buy a conspiracy theory but ignore their own reality?

Republicans.

Meeting in Moscow Saturday, the state GOP Central Committee gave credence to the China story by directing Otter to go slow. The GOP resolution says in part: "The stability of our form of government is being undermined by strategies used by the Chinese state-government-controlled entities through investments, corporate takeovers, intelligence operations and rare-Earth monopolization."

The recipe for this GOP paranoia cocktail includes the following:

- Otter's trade delegation to China a year ago.
- Talk of China National Machinery Industry Corp. obtaining a technology zone south of the Boise Airport.
- Idaho Commerce Director Don Dietrich describing China's potential investment in Idaho as "a beachhead in the United States."
- A long-standing federal visa policy allowing foreign investors to live in the United States. The program, known as EB-5, is part of Otter's Project 60 - a plan to expand Idaho's economy from about \$55 billion to \$60 billion.

Add to this stew the lunatic fringe and here's what you get:

"There is in Gov. Otter's letter nothing of substance, plenty of weasel words, and an extraordinary display of misdirection all designed to lull the citizens of the sovereign state of Idaho into a stupor while their state is sold to the Chinese," wrote Joe Wolverton in the New American, published by the John Birch Society.

Added Boise blogger Bill Turner, "Gov. Butch Otter, in league with notorious Marxist, B. Hussein Obama, have (sic) hatched a plan to make Idaho the first Chinese-owned state in America."

Now to believe all that, you'd have to conclude the laws of the United States don't apply within this country.

That the EB-5 has exaggerated powers.

That Dietrich's China "beachhead" statement was more than an economic metaphor.

That China can do more damage to the American economy building products within the U.S. than by continuing to ship cheaper imports into this country and undermining domestic manufacturers.

And that the same governor who in four decades of public life built a reputation as a Ralph Smeed acolyte suddenly returned from China some sort of a Manchurian candidate.

However misdirected, people have good cause for this anxiety. Every time their interests come up against special interests, they come off second best:

- A state sales tax that is chock-full of so many special interest exemptions that most of Idaho's economy now escapes it.
- A fuel tax and vehicle registration system that has ordinary motorists subsidizing the trucking industry.
- A governor and Legislature that low-balled the revenue estimates, cut schools, higher education and health care more deeply than necessary and now may use the artificial surplus to give tax cuts to corporations.
- State leaders who cut school budgets and used some of the savings to create a market for the private, for-profit online education industry that has nurtured their careers.
- A tax ploy that shifted schools off the property tax, funneled the savings to corporations and wealthy property owners, saddled lower- and middle-income families with higher costs and undermined the stability of the public schools.

So where was the GOP resolution condemning all that? Who was speaking up for the small business owners and wage earners who bear the burdens but receive a smaller share of the rewards?

Why is it easier for some people to believe their friends in government are part of a fantastic conspiracy to betray them to a foreign power - but somehow they just can't accept the notion that these same folks engage in run-of-the-mill cronyism? - M.T.