

# In Idaho, Lincoln's house stands divided

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Idaho Republicans agree on two things: Their affinity for Reaganesque platitudes in November and their animosity toward President Obama year-round.

And that's just about it.

On the debt ceiling crisis, where is any common ground between 1st District Congressman Raul Labrador and 2nd District Congressman Mike Simpson? Until the last minute, Labrador seemed willing to risk default to constrain debt. Simpson sees default as the greater hazard.

Can you really say this party stands for a simple standard of right and wrong when the GOP Central Committee can condemn Senate Majority Caucus Chairman John McGee of Caldwell - a moderate - for drunken driving, but looks the other way when Rep. Phil Hart, R-Athol - a renegade conservative - steals state timber and shirks his taxes?

Do you see one political party or two when it's no longer a fight about means, but a battle over ends?

One battalion of Idaho Republicans pursues limited government.

Another strives to "starve the beast" of government.

For one group, faith trumps facts; for the other, the reverse is true.

One side seeks compromise; the other vilifies it.

One sees empty heads in its opponents; the other sees vacant souls.

One group fears the voters; the other proceeds as if it may not mind losing elections.

Any political structure as large as Idaho's GOP is bound to have internal tensions. But is this just a family squabble?

Not when each side can turn to a separate financial apparatus. Operating outside the formal party structure is the Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry-launched Idaho Prosperity Fund, which backs traditional GOP candidates and an occasional pro-business Democrat. It's no coincidence that the architect of that political action

committee, IACI Vice President Jason Ronk, was the Idaho GOP's executive director under Chairman Kirk Sullivan - until insurrectionists deposed Sullivan in 2006.

Not when political operatives see their own candidates as the enemy. In Coeur d'Alene, the regional GOP central committee accused state Sens. Shawn Keough, R-Sandpoint, and Joyce Broadword, R-Sagle, of political treason for proposing how the state Redistricting Commission should draw the Panhandle's legislative districts.

Not when the membership is hyphenated. Is this the Idaho Republican Party? Or is it is an amalgam in which some members are Tea Party-Republicans or Libertarian-Republicans?

Not with different icons. At minimum, shouldn't every Republican revere its first president? As Washington Post columnist E. J. Dionne put it, the GOP was the House that Abraham Lincoln built. But in Idaho, Republican lawmakers embraced the secessionist mantra of nullification. How many agree with presidential candidate Ron Paul, who accused Lincoln of igniting the Civil War in pursuit of a stronger federal government and to "get rid of the original tenet of the Republic"?

To characterize this as a squabble between a right and left wing is to confuse metaphors. What's going on with Idaho's dominant political party is cellular division at best and genetic mutation at worst. Each starts off with the same DNA, but that's all.

Ultimately, your fate and that of your children is wedded to this political organism. Where it leads, we will follow. Between the upcoming legislative redistricting and the closed Republican primary, that's likely to be a bizarre and unpleasant place.- M.T.