

This is not your father's Idaho Republican Party

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Only 18 years ago, this was the face of the Idaho Republican Party:

- Phil Batt, a former GOP chairman and governor, a self-described penny pincher who was willing to take on anybody, including his own party, on behalf of the underdog.
- U.S. Sen. Jim McClure, who exuded civility and quiet competence.
- House Speakers Tom Boyd, R-Genesee, Mike Simpson, R-Blackfoot, and Bruce Newcomb, R-Burley, who famously kept their chamber on an ethical footing. Newcomb even called an ethics probe on himself.
- Senate leaders such as the late Jerry Twigg, R-Blackfoot, Mike Crapo, R-Idaho Falls, and Jim Risch, R-Boise, who pursued a culture of collegiality.

It wasn't flashy. Under this leadership, Idaho tended to plod along. But it was a no-nonsense, limited-government philosophy that served a broad constituency.

Who is the face of the GOP today?

- John McGee - The former Canyon County state senator poised for advancement - he acquired the moniker "boy governor" - got drunk, stole an SUV and trailer, jackknifed it, all on Father's Day. He made restitution, got the felony grand theft charge dropped and pleaded guilty to drunken driving. Next, he manipulated the system reimbursing lawmakers for living expenses to get an extra \$6,000. Still, he hung on to his leadership post as Republican Caucus chairman until last week, when allegations that he sexually harassed a young woman on his staff led to his resignation from office.
- Phil Hart - The House Republican from Athol who refuses to pay his taxes, uses his office as a dodge against tax enforcement, steals timber from state endowment land and continued to serve on the House tax committee until he gave House Speaker Lawrence Denny permission to remove him.
- Tom Loertscher - After Denney steered it to him, the Iona Republican, as chairman of the House State Affairs Committee, buried a bill that might have undermined his road abandonment fight with his own county commissioners.
- Denney - They don't call the speaker "Boss Denney" for nothing. He has killed ethics legislation and tax reform bills. He plays favorites - Hart and Loertscher, for instance - while inflicting punishment on those who cross him, such as Rep. Eric Anderson, R-Priest Lake, who got demoted for filing an ethics complaint against Hart. Along with Idaho GOP Chairman Norm Semanko, he sought to frustrate the will of the people by dismantling the citizens redistricting

commission. And he recently shut off public access to House offices within the state Capitol.

- Ron Crane - The state treasurer got caught spending lavishly on himself and his colleagues: Tax dollars to cover his daily commute from Nampa. Diverting state funds toward a nonprofit he runs. Doling out money when traveling to New York City to meet with bond rating firms.
- Royce Chigbrow - The former State Tax Commission chairman was famous for cutting sweetheart deals with corporations while intervening to help his son's accounting firm as well as taking sides with a friend who had a business dispute with a former partner.
- Larry Craig - Whatever happened in that Minneapolis airport men's room where Craig was accused of soliciting gay sex from an undercover cop, Craig covered up his guilty plea. He then misled Idaho voters about his "intent" to resign in 2007, only to serve the rest of his term. His actions, including the use of campaign cash to pay for an ill-fated challenge to his conviction, drew a reprimand from the Senate Ethics Committee. All the while, not a single prominent Idaho Republican criticized Craig.

This is not your father's Idaho Republican Party. In the second decade of one-party rule, Idaho's GOP serves its own interests, not yours. It arrogantly dispatches questions about cronyism, ethical lapses and front-page embarrassments.

The GOP brand has been tainted. Not enough to give Idaho's under-financed and poorly organized Democrats an opening to exploit.

But that day is getting closer. - M.T.