

# The importance of perspective

CHRIS CARLSON, The Carlson Chronicle

A few years back the marketing folks at the Idaho Department of Commerce came up with the slogan "Idaho Is What America Was." The idea was to capitalize on the notion Idaho had not yet been polluted/corrupted/spoiled by uncontrolled development, that we still had pure air, clean water, beautiful vistas and good, hard-working people who believed they could still achieve the American dream.

Mercifully, the slogan died a quiet death for it did not meet the basic test of verisimilitude----it did not resemble the truth. Rather it reflected the natural penchant folks have for creating myths and rhapsodizing about a time that never was.

Rather than looking back at a mythic place and time that never was, one might as well project ahead and ask if Idaho has become what a small demographically declining slice of the nation would like America to be: narrow-minded, self-centered, almost all white, intolerant, homophobic, anti-intellectual, litmus testing, teacher deprecating, anti-union, tax-dodging, flag-waving, anti-immigrant, head-in-the-sand, gun-toting, allegedly Christian believing but anti-Christian acting, paranoid, fear-mongering, hate-the government, pro-unregulated business, survival of the fittest, subsidize the rich because it trickles down, my way or the highway strict Constitutional constructionists most of whom call themselves Republicans?

From the standpoint of natural beauty and recreation Idaho is second to none. All those who love to fish, hunt, hike, backpack, float rivers, bike, bird, ski or take pictures realize how blessed we are. It is also filled with many good and decent people who without hesitation give the shirt off their back to anyone they see in need.

In the last 20 years, though, Idaho, from a political standpoint, started to get off track. Since the end of Phil Batt's one fine term as governor the Gem state has headed in a downhill direction at an increasingly rapid rate.

It's enough to make anyone despair for the wrong path after awhile looks almost impossible to turn around and away from. This is where perspective is needed.

Thankfully, from a demographic standpoint Idaho does not come close to being a microcosm of the nation. The narrow-minded, libertarian, government hating types say "good," they don't want to be like the rest. The challenge for sensible people living here is that we take this heavily Republican dominated state as the way the rest of the nation is not realizing how out of step Idaho is with what is really happening.

America is changing so fast and so dynamically it soon will be obvious to the most ardent Tea Party nut this state has been left in the dust. For Governor Butch Otter to say Idaho is the "new near normal" and what Idaho is should be what the rest of America wants to be is laughable on its face if it weren't so sad that he and many others believe that

balderdash.

Exacerbating this distorted sense of reality is the national media's fascination with the Republican race for the presidential nomination, and Idaho, being such a Republican state, is awash in media hype compounded of course by Mitt Romney being the first serious Latter-Day Saint to have a plausible chance at being nominated and maybe even elected.

So let's keep it all in perspective. Here are a few facts for perspective:

- ◆ The nation is 63.7 percent white; Idaho is 86 percent white.
- ◆ Self-identified Republicans are 45 percent of Idaho's electorate, nationally, 32 percent.
- ◆ A slight majority of the nation now supports same sex marriage while a majority in Idaho opposes it.
- ◆ Idaho is one of the more church-going states, most of the nation and a clear majority is much more sporadic in actually attending church.
- ◆ By a 66 percent to 26 percent margin the electorate supports the Federal requirement that private health care plans cover the full cost of birth control for female patients. A majority of Idahoans, especially Idaho women, agree.
- ◆ Despite anti-government rhetoric, 16 percent of employed Idahoans work for some level of government.
- ◆ Idaho still receives more from the Federal government than it pays in: \$1.21 back for every \$1 it pays according to latest Tax Foundation data.
- ◆ No prominent Idaho Democrat has accepted a ride on Melaleuca chairman Frank VanderSloot's private jet, while Governor Mitt Romney, Governor Butch Otter and Senator James Risch have.

And while at it, let's keep the entire horse-race hullabaloo for the GOP presidential nomination in perspective also. The New York Times fine columnist, Tim Egan (a Spokane native) recently pointed out what a small fraction of America was engaged in that process. Those trying to pick the nominee he wrote are predominantly "old, white, uniformly Christian and unrepresentative of the nation at large."

Bottom line is this: Idaho never was an America that never existed and what it is today

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never will be what America will become. Thank the good Lord.

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