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## Test day

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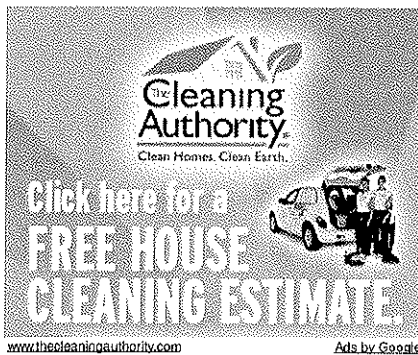
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Marty Trillhaase |

JEERS ... to Wayne Hoffman, executive director of the Idaho Freedom Foundation. Not long ago, Hoffman issued his hit list, the Idaho Freedom Index, which handed out accolades to lawmakers who demonstrated "a pro-free market and freedom-oriented voting record; negative numbers indicate the opposite."

Uber-conservatives such as Rep. Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene, and Sen. Monty Pearce, R-New Plymouth, got the best marks, and Hoffman likes uber-conservatives.



Now this stuff is showing up in attack ads against moderate Republicans. Sure looks like Hoffman started out with an answer key and built his test around it.

For instance, the Spokesman-Review's Betsy Russell reported the index "declared anyone voting yes on a budget bill to be a big spender, and ranked lawmakers by the number of 'yes' votes."

That's like blaming your accountant for your income tax bill. He has no control over the tax laws or your income.

Members of the joint House-Senate budget committee don't make the ground rules - how much money the state will have after taxes are cut or raised by other lawmakers. They simply allocate the funds available.

By the time their work hits the House and Senate floor, it's an up or down vote. Members either cast a protest vote against spending they considered too high or too low - or they do their jobs. At some point, you have to pass a budget.

In any event, this was hardly a liberal spending blueprint. Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter's priorities were followed. Lawmakers spent a little less than he proposed.

Taken to its logical conclusion, however, Hoffman's index would reward any radical lawmaker who shuts down state government and

punish anybody who responsibly stands in his way.

CHEERS ... to retiring Washington Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown, D-Spokane. Eastern Washington's voice at the Democratic leadership table suddenly called it quits last week after 20 years in the Legislature, including eight at the helm of the Senate.

Elected from an oasis of Democratic supporters in an otherwise solidly Republican region, Brown had a thankless job - corralling a narrow majority that eventually came apart this year when three conservative Democrats defected and gave the GOP control of the budget.

She was unapologetic - even courageous - on some things. For instance, she never retreated from her support for an income tax in order to balance and stabilize Washington's volatile revenues. That stand is as unpopular as it is correct.

As the Tacoma News Tribune's Peter Callaghan wrote Tuesday, "... she was usually the smartest person in the room, and not just because she holds a doctoral degree in economics and has taught at both Eastern Washington University and Gonzaga. Brown brings a depth and breadth of knowledge that is uncommon in a place where many lawmakers stay on the surface of subject matter."

JEERS ... to Ryan Davidson of Boise. Remember standing in line during the March 6 Republican presidential caucuses? How about burning up time in a meeting room?

If you do, you were among nearly 45,000 people who took the time to be counted.

Of those, 27,514 chose Mitt Romney, giving him all 32 of Idaho's delegates to the Republican National Convention.

Davidson's choice, Ron Paul, came third with 8,086 caucus votes.

What to do? Says Davidson, change the rules.

As the Idaho Statesman's Dan Popkey reported, Davidson has posted a video on YouTube detailing plans to elect pro-Paul precinct captains in Tuesday's GOP primary. They in turn will take over the state GOP state convention June 22 at Twin Falls. Next step: a two-thirds vote to hijack Romney's delegates and hand them over to Paul.

"If two-thirds of the delegates to the Idaho State Convention are Ron Paul supporters, they can vote to suspend the rules, overturn the results of the caucus and award all the national delegates to Ron Paul," Davidson said.

So much for democracy.

Paul's national campaign disavowed Davidson Thursday.

JEERS ... to Sen. Monty Pearce, R-New Plymouth. Like Rep. Phil Hart, R-Athol, before him, Pearce got himself into an ethics mess - and then relied on campaign contributors to help get him out.

Chairman of the Resources and Environment Committee, Pearce kept quiet about the oil and gas leases he signed on his property until he had helped steer toward passage bills the oil and gas industry sought to open up Idaho for exploration.

Accused of not reporting the conflict of interest, Pearce hired Boise attorney Charles Peterson and prevailed with an ethics investigation. Turns out Pearce paid Peterson \$4,400 from his campaign account.

That's just like Hart, who squeezed \$1,000 from his contributors to pay Coeur d'Alene lawyer Starr Kelso. A tax evader and timber thief, Hart also faced ethics charges.

It's all legal. But nobody ever wrote a campaign check expecting it to end up in a lawyer's pocket.

JEERS ... to state Rep Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene. Not content with merely getting himself elected to the state Senate, Nonini has jumped into another race - steering \$1,000 from his Idaho Association for Good Government PAC toward Oakley Republican Douglas Pickett.

Pickett is challenging Sen. Dean Cameron, R-Rupert, an 11-term incumbent who heads the budget committee.

In so doing, Nonini has just committed an act of political malpractice. Relationships are everything in the Legislature. Odds are he's going to need Cameron a lot more than Cameron will need him. So while Cameron is writing budgets, Nonini will be answering mail at the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee.

That's hardly good news for northern Idaho. Could it be the Great Nonini does not know all? - M.T.

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