

Personal political rhetoric not wanted here

By Wayne Hoffman/Idaho Freedom Foundation

During the heated debate on the state insurance exchange, I made it a point to tell people that my chief political rival on the issue, Gov. Butch Otter, is a friend of mine, and still is. In the midst of battle during the winter, I saw Butch at a function in Weiser and we embraced and shared a laugh over our "dueling petitions"—his in support of the exchange and mine against.

Then we talked about family and other trivial, light things. Butch is a friend. Wrong on the exchange, I think, but a friend. I would never seek to denigrate him over a public policy point on which we disagree, and I haven't.

Outside of Idaho, politics is too personal, and unnecessarily so. But now, unfortunately even here in Idaho, a couple of news outlets and some independent commentators have sought to demonize, vilify, condemn and, indeed, destroy individuals, based on their public policy disagreements.

Sen. Bob Nonini of Coeur d'Alene is one of those unfairly targeted. Idaho Falls Post Register editorial writer Corey Taule last week labeled Nonini as being "one of Idaho's worst legislators." Based on what? By what measure, Corey? Give us some analysis that puts Nonini's record under some kind of a measure that compares him to his peers. Corey, too, is a friend of mine, but I strongly, openly and harshly reject this kind of hyperbole, even from my buddies.

I don't know whether Bob is the best or the worst of anything, but I will tell you that Bob has been consistently one of the top pro-free market legislators in Idaho. That's at least an objective measure based on real data, not hip shots.

Both the Post Register and the Lewiston Tribune claimed Nonini's bill supporting tax credits for private school purposefully violates the Idaho Constitution. But both fail to mention that the state attorney general's office reviewed the legislation and found it to be perfectly constitutional, and that similar legislation in states with similar constitutional provisions as Idaho's have been upheld as constitutional. This is a lie by omission, left out, I suppose, because it didn't fit their vitriolic narrative.

Also last week, Chris Carlson, a former journalist, reached into 20-year-old court records to charge that Nonini is "ethically challenged." I don't know about that either, but as former reporters, Chris and I have studied journalism ethics and both know the definition of "actual malice." He should read up on the topic.

And finally, a few days ago, former state Sen. Tim Corder attacked Sen. John Goedde's "hubris" for helping reinstate several labor laws rejected by voters in 2012. Corder said Goedde should return the flag that he received two years ago in recognition for his education reform efforts. Corder took a public policy disagreement and made it personal. Then he tried to make it sound as if Goedde is extending his middle finger to Idaho voters.

To heighten his case, Corder followed the well-trodden trail of omission and ignored the fact that some of the reinstated reforms passed the Legislature unanimously, namely the requirement that labor negotiations take place in open session and that labor contracts and school budgets be made available online. Other legislation debated and passed by the Legislature were limited to items never subjected to public scrutiny or advertisements during last year's election.

Idaho political discourse should be subjected to a higher standard than the one used in Washington, D.C., Ohio and Illinois. These newspapers and commentators have failed to live up to that higher standard for political engagement, and they should be called out for it.