

From 'we the people' to 'we these people'

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Living on the Idaho-Washington state line, you'd have to be blind not to see the widening blue-state, red-state divide.

With Washington, you have a state that enacted same-sex marriage and recreational marijuana by a vote of the people.

In Idaho, the courts dragged the state kicking and screaming into marriage equality - and if you score a small bag of pot in a Washington store and bring it to the Gem State, you're facing a misdemeanor conviction.

Washington's Supreme Court has the Legislature tied up in knots about how it will fulfill its constitutional duty to adequately fund public education.

Idaho's Supreme Court responded to the same constitutional failure on the Legislature's part with a shrug and a punt.

In Washington, the national GOP brand is toxic. No Republican has been elected governor since 1980. The state has not put a Republican in the U.S. Senate since 1994. It hasn't voted for a Republican president since 1984.

Just the reverse in Idaho. No Democrat has won a Senate seat since 1974. The last Democratic governor was elected in 1990. And Idaho hasn't backed a Democratic president since 1964.

But last Tuesday's election saw that gap widen into a schism.

Washington went for Hillary Clinton; Idaho voted for Donald Trump.

Washington re-elected Democratic Sen. Patty Murray and a congressional delegation where Democrats hold six of the 10 seats. Idaho's congressional delegation, headed by Republican Sen. Mike Crapo, remains all GOP.

Democrats picked up a seat or two in Washington's Legislature; Republicans picked up four seats in Idaho.

There was a little ticket splitting on the west side of the state line. Kim Wyman was re-elected as secretary of state - an office that has gone to a Republican in every election since 1964 - and voters picked between two Republicans running for treasurer. Otherwise, from Gov. Jay Insee on down, it was a Democratic sweep.

What really told the tale, however, were the ballot measures.

For the second time in a row, Washington voters embraced curbs on gun ownership rights. This time, they allowed judges to intervene if a person was deemed a threat to himself or others.

In Idaho, just a harsh word from the NRA was enough to sink the most moderate Democrat.

Washington voters also raised the minimum wage to \$13.50 an hour during the next four years. Idaho's wage is tied to the federal minimum of \$7.25 an hour.

And whether they passed or not, each of Washington's ballot measures represented a left-of-center challenge to legislative authority. The only measure on Idaho's ballot actually strengthened the hand of Republican lawmakers - and it passed handily.

What could account for such a divide?

Any election that made Donald Trump president can't be chalked up to traditional right vs. left philosophical differences.

Nor can you assign this split to religion - evangelicals embraced the twice-divorced, fast-living Trump.

Look to demographics.

Urbanites - younger, ethnically diverse, educated - voted Democratic, whether they lived in Seattle or Boise.

Rural residents - homogeneously white, older and less educated - voted Republican, whether they lived in northern Idaho or eastern Washington.

Some would call this the "big sort" - people choosing to congregate in communities based on shared culture and economics - and then voting accordingly.

Others might simply strip it down to tribalism.

Either way, people living on the west side of the Snake River answer to King County's principles; those on the east side of that state border live under Canyon County's core values. And with each election, you see less and less in common between the two. No longer "we the people;" it's more like "we, these people."

Maybe you can still see one country on both sides of that gulf.

It might help to consult the nearest optometrist first. - M.T.