

Here's one Idahoan who's not afraid of Trump

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune Idaho Republican Mike Simpson is serving his 10th term in the U.S. House of Representatives.

He's now a "cardinal" - which means he is chairman of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Energy and Water Development.

Before that, Simpson spent seven terms in the Idaho House - where he rose to become House speaker.

He is no glory hound.

He's an establishment figure.

He does not pine to get booked on "Meet the Press" or "Face the Nation."

He is not one to engage in hyperbolic bomb throwing.

But when you ask Simpson a question, he's prone toward delivering a candid answer.

Case in point: Last week's Politico report about Republican congressional dissatisfaction with a legislative agenda stalled by President Trump's mishandling of the Russia investigation, fights with the media and use of his Twitter account.

"I don't even pay attention to what is going on with the administration because I don't care. They're a distraction. The family is a distraction, the president is a distraction," Simpson said.. "At first, it was 'Well yeah, this is the guy we elected. He'll learn, he'll learn.' And you just don't see that happening.

"Quite frankly, I'm starting to wonder if anyone in the (Trump) family knows what the truth is."

Keep in mind, as MSNBC's Steve Benen noted, Simpson is not some center-left Republican. According to the political website FiveThirtyEight, Simpson has voted 100 percent with the president.

But he's also steeped in the culture of Capitol Hill, has friends on both sides of the aisle, reads widely and is a student of the legislative process. And unlike many of his colleagues, he's not inclined to conceal his frustration with the Trump White House.

In fact, it's becoming something of a pattern.

When former FBI Director James Comey testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee in May, Simpson didn't mince words; he found Comey's story more believable than the president's.

"I don't know everything, but everything I know, Comey has the credibility," he said. "If he's written this down in memos and so forth, maybe told his chief of staff about it when he wrote it down and stuff, that's pretty damaging."

According to the Washington Post, Simpson also drew parallels to the Watergate scandal, which drove President Richard Nixon to resign in 1974.

"What I'm worried about is, in the early 1970s, politicians like me were standing around saying, 'Nixon's OK, he didn't do anything,' and look what it led to," Simpson said. "And every day there is something that adds on to it."

Nor has Simpson retracted his denunciation of Trump during last fall's "Access Hollywood" scandal when the Republican standard bearer was caught on tape acknowledging his sexual abuse of women: "While I've never endorsed Donald Trump, I find his recent comments about women deplorable. In my opinion, he has demonstrated that he is unfit to be president and I can not support him."

That puts Simpson at odds not only with Congressman Raul Labrador and Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter - who got in line and campaigned for Trump - but also Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, who initially condemned Trump in even stronger terms but then came back to the GOP fold.

Where this is headed, who knows?

You can count on this much: Nothing about Donald Trump or his minions scares Simpson.

Having survived a Club for Growth-engineered primary challenge in 2014, the Idaho Republican trusts his 2nd Congressional District voters. After all, he's been more successful in winning Idaho GOP primaries than Trump - who last year lost the state to Texas Republican Sen. Ted Cruz.

And Simpson is playing the long game. Years from now, he'll have no reason to regret what he has said about Trump.

Which is a lot more than you can say about Simpson's colleagues in Idaho or anywhere else.-
M.T.