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## Opinion: Some takeaways from the primary election

EDITORIAL BOARD

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Now that the dust has settled from Tuesday's primary election — or, more specifically, the Republican portion of the primary — let's go over some of the takeaways.

**THE TURNOUT** — The Idaho Secretary of State's office reported about 32.8% of registered voters cast ballots in the primaries, the highest number in a midterm primary election since 1994. That's to be applauded. Turnout rates approached and even passed the 50% mark in a handful of small, rural counties. The state reported 975,532 registered voters — an 18% jump from the 826,491 registered to vote in the 2018 midterm primaries. There were 573,578 registered voters in Idaho for the 1994 midterm primaries, an historic midterm election year which saw a Republican wave roll into Congress.

That turnout represents something important: a sense of frustration and concern in the direction the Republican Party in Idaho has taken with extreme right groups like the Idaho Freedom Foundation trying to dictate the course. The IFF would be foolish to believe that frustration and concern came just from Democrats. We received a phone call just the Friday before the election from a conservative voter in St. Anthony voicing those feelings, taking direct aim at the IFF and its leaders as well as other far-right extremist groups and the Bonneville County Republican Central Committee.

**SPEAKING OF ...** — The next time the BCRCC gets a notion to call itself the "OFFICIAL Republican Party" as it did in its "sample ballot" mailers, it might want to think again. All that stunt brought was 1) a lawsuit in a state court from the Idaho GOP seeking to stop the BCRCC from "continuing to break election laws ahead of" the May 17 vote on the

prior Thursday, and 2) Fourth District Judge Jason Scott issuing a preliminary injunction late the next day preventing the central committee from using direct mail, social media, flyers or other forms of communication to make endorsements.

Not a good look, especially when Idaho's primary was receiving national attention as a gauge for national races, seeing how Trump-backed candidates and other candidates with a similar mindset would fare.

**THE RESULTS** — The highest-profile Trump-backed candidate in Idaho — Lt. Gov. Janice McGeachin, staging a heated bid against incumbent Gov. Brad Little — fell in convincing fashion. The Idaho Statesman was reporting that McGeachin's loss was by the biggest percentage of any Trump-backed candidate in national polling so far.

National articles focused on the divisions between traditional conservative and far-right political candidates in Idaho. Sure, we saw Raul Labrador finish ahead of incumbent Attorney General Lawrence Wasden. But we also saw "true conservative" candidates like Bryan Smith, Priscilla Giddings, Dorothy Moon, Branden Durst, Ron Nate, and Chad Christensen fail in their hopes to gain or hold on to offices.

Christensen wasn't about to go down gently, pinning the post-election blame for his loss on what he considered to be Democrats switching over to vote in the Republican primary. Apparently Christensen hasn't taken the "frustrated Republicans" factor into consideration, along with a wealth of unaffiliated voters willing to affiliate at polling places as is allowed under Idaho Code. That was something some Republican lawmakers were fighting against in March during the last legislative session, saying independent voters may not reflect the values of a "true conservative."

Ah, the power of independents.

**THE BIGGEST LESSON** — Tuesday's primary featured 42 contested races involving sitting Republican lawmakers. Nearly half of the incumbents lost. Yes, some of them were moderate. Still others — such as Christensen, who so easily calls lawmakers (or

constituents on Facebook for that matter) he doesn't see eye to eye with RINOs — didn't make the cut either.

"I think the message to both extremes is that we need to find some middle ground," said Rep. Charlie Shepherd, R-Pollock.

State Republicans held their traditional "unity rally" Wednesday as they try and pull together to face Democratic challengers in November. Even then, it was reported that there were notable absences with all but one of the losing GOP candidates for statewide offices missing.

"Some people will take a little more time to unite," state GOP Chairman Tom Luna said. "But we're all going to be united."

If Idaho Republicans take nothing else away from what happened Tuesday, they'd better remember this: It's time to govern. It's time to put divisive non-issues to rest. It's time to stop looking for solutions to problems that don't exist. It's time to stop this game of "I'm the most conservative."

Just govern, and do it like the overall good of the people depends on it.

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