

https://www.postregister.com/opinion/guest_column/opinion-don-t-kid-yourself-hoffman-won-this-election/article_80227db5-e6f8-56c1-98e1-1a94b0b4f3d2.html

OPINION: Don't kid yourself; Hoffman won this election

By MARTY TRILLHAASE The Lewiston Tribune

May 27, 2022

Last winter, Idaho Freedom Foundation President Wayne Hoffman was bitterly complaining about how his lack of influence in the state Senate interfered with the handiwork of his allies in the Idaho House.

That's why a string of bills popular in the House — including one that would jail librarians, another that would interfere with COVID-19 mitigation efforts or a measure that weakened a community's legal defenses against armed militia groups — were bottled up in the Senate.

"That's the problem," Hoffman told a friendly group in Coeur d'Alene. "Imagine what we can do if we had a conservative House and a conservative Senate."

Imagine no longer.

While some of his acolytes in the House — among them Reps. Ron Nate, R-Rexburg (Freedom Index score of 97%), Chad Christensen, R-Iona (index score 99%), and Kerry Hanks, R-St. Anthony (IFF-98%), — were ousted in last week's primary, Hoffman cleaned up in the Senate.

IFF started with three allies in the Senate — people such as the retiring Christy Zito of Hammett with a 91% IFF score, Regina Bayer of Meridian at 83% and Steve Vick of Dalton Gardens at 75%.

Now he's got at least 11 districts represented by people who have voted his way or intend to — and maybe more depending on the outcome of the Nov. 8 general election.

Among his wins:

n Cindy Carlson of Riggins over Sen. Carl Crabtree, R-Grangeville (IFF score- 60%.)

n Former Sen. Dan Foreman, R-Moscow (who IFF ranked at 99% in 2018) dispatched Sen. Robert Blair of Kendrick (IFF score- 40%). Foreman now faces incumbent Sen. Dave Nelson, D-Moscow (IFF score- 26%), in November.

n Among the incumbents ousted were Sen. Jim Woodward, R-Sagle (IFF scored at 39%), Peter Riggs, R-Post Falls (IFF-46%), Jeff Agenbrod, R-Nampa (IFF-33%) Jim Rice, R-Caldwell (IFF-55%), Fred Martin, R-Boise (IFF-33%), and Jim Patrick, R-Twin Falls (IFF-32%).

Throw in the retirees including Sen. Patti Anne Lodge, R-Caldwell (IFF-30%) and moderate House members who failed to win their bids for the Senate, such as Rep. Greg Chaney, R-Caldwell (IFF-38%).

n Then tally up the winners in the Senate contests, including state Rep. Tammy Nichols, R-Middleton (IFF-98%), Rep. Ben Adams, R-Nampa (IFF-78%), Rep. Doug Okuniewicz, R-Sagle (IFF score- 93%), as well as Glenneda Zuiderveld of Twin Falls, described by the Idaho Statesman as an "extremist," former state Rep. Phil Hart of Kellogg, who built a reputation as a tax scofflaw, and Scott Herndon of Sagle, who wants to eliminate all abortions.

Establishment Republicans prevailed throughout much of the Magic Valley and eastern Idaho. So 11 members in a caucus of 28 Republicans is not a majority.

But it's closer. What was once impossible to get through the Senate may become plausible, depending on how the votes shake out.

For instance, you may see pressure to pass a school voucher bill.

Don't be surprised if Hoffman's allies try to whittle away at the Medicaid expansion law they so detest.

Higher education, especially diversity programs, remain a target. And the culture wars will proceed with renewed vigor.

What's stopping them?

The Senate leadership, primarily President Pro Tem Sen. Chuck Winder, R-Boise, looks to be on track to retain the power to lead the committees and direct legislation. But the margin for error is narrow — especially if a handful of Republicans defect.

IFF-backed candidates prevailed in the 1st Congressional District. But the 2nd District retained its mixture of moderate Republicans and the handful of Democrats representing Blaine, Ada and Bannock counties. While a grand coalition of southern Idaho Republicans and Democrats is not in the cards, on an issue-by-issue basis — primarily must-pass budget bills — Democrats may provide the needed votes for passage much as their counterparts have in the House.

All of which leaves Gov. Brad Little.

Little's renomination last week over a right-wing challenger all but guarantees his reelection.

Presumably, that frees Little from continuing to pander to the right wing of his base.

He'll need that flexibility, too.

Because the only thing standing between you and a rising tide of fringe legislation headed to his desk is a veto.

Of course, that depends on how much Little is willing to use it.

Marty Trillhaase is the opinion page editor of the Lewiston Tribune, where this editorial originally appeared.