

EDITORIAL

READER'S VIEW

Maybe Democrats' values are more in line with your own



**BRIAN
CRONIN**

It would be tempting to dismiss all the criminal allegations and indictments swirling around powerful Republicans as a strictly Washington, D.C., phenomenon. But after a decade of Republican domination in Idaho, it's safe to say that the very same culture of corruption has taken root in the Gem State.

Last spring, we learned our governor was exploiting a loophole in order to collect contributions for a campaign he never intends to run. The special interest and corporate money was being used for expensive haircuts, lavish meals, chocolate and other frivolous expenses. At the same time, the governor

and top Republican lawmakers accomplished the deregulation of Idaho's dominant phone utility. How does a bill that does nothing to serve the public interest and everything to benefit a corporation become law? Follow the money trail: Look at which legislators (and governor) received big contributions from Qwest and then look at how they voted.

The University Place fiasco, "an incestuous mess," according to former State Sen. Stan Hawkins, R-Ucon, has cost taxpayers millions. The subsequent Prince Report, which reads like a who's who of the Republican Party, has prompted ongoing and far-reaching federal and county crim-

inal investigations. Have you heard of the "developer's discount?" This proprietary tax exemption, supposedly created for ranchers and farmers, has allowed folks like Gov. Dirk Kempthorne to get away with paying less than \$10 in taxes for his 14 acres near Cascade.

At the local level, the tangled investigation into who smeared mayoral candidate Chuck Windler with a wave of anonymous, 11th-hour calls continues. Cries for justice from the Republican political elite, who backed Windler's candidacy, have been muted now that it appears those involved in the potentially illegal attacks were fellow Republicans.

Kuna Sen. Jack Noble shamed the Senate last spring by failing to disclose conflicts of interest on a bill he sponsored and then lying about it under oath. Our three Republican Ada County commissioners allegedly violated closed meeting laws in June; their legal defense has now cost taxpayers over \$15,000.

Back in D.C., Reps. Oter and Simpson received money from Jack Abramoff, the Republican super-lobbyist convicted on tax evasion, fraud and corruption charges. Sen. Craig received over \$8,000 from defense contractor Brent Wilkes, his company, and his associates. Wilkes bribed ex-California congressman Duke Cunningham with money and gifts in exchange for government contracts.

The stench that hangs over Boise has nothing to do with our winter inversions. It's about the concentration of power in the hands of a party that governs by secrecy and cronyism. Two parties of relatively equal strength provide for vigorous debate, thoughtful compromise, creative solutions, and plenty of oversight and accountability — such a system is the hallmark of our democracy. Absent such balance, absolute power is the result, and we all know what absolute power does.

Certainly, not all Republicans are corrupt, nor are all Democrats untainted. But a disturbing pattern of behavior by the party in power should give independent and Republican voters pause.

For those pondering the predictable response, "All the Democrats do is complain, but don't offer any solutions," save your

breath. For many years, Idaho Democrats have introduced bills promoting open government, campaign finance reform, and stronger ethics laws — legislation that was swiftly killed by Republicans.

As we enter a new legislative session and an election year, voters should consider what Republican rule has wrought: costly scandals, closed government, and a pay-to-play system at the Statehouse.

Then look at the many fine candidates on the ballot this year who don't have an "R" after their names. You may find that their values and priorities are much more in line with your own.

Brian Cronin is the chairman of the Ada County Democrats.