# GOP endorsement of candidates a power play

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The recent action of State Republican Party Chairman Blake Hall, Idaho Falls attorney, and the GOP Central Committee to possibly endorse so-called "true Republicans" appears an attempt at a haughty display of power.

Blake G. Hall

The leaders said that under a rule adopted by the central committee it may endorse candidates in next May's primary election to identify those they consider to be bonafide Republicans.

This maneuver has been attempted in the Idaho Legislature in different forms and has been turned down as late as this year's session. It is intended to enhance power of party leaders, whether Republicans or Democrats.

A bill was tossed in the hopper early in the 1985 Legislature to require that any candidate for congressional or high state office get at least 25 percent endorsement of the party delegates at their biennial June convention.

Under this plan, the convention delegates could endorse not more than three candidates for office to be voted on by the electors in the primary. It would necessitate the primary convention to be delayed to August or possibly September from May.

The bill was spearheaded by the late Dennis Olsen, then the state Republican chairman, and the central committee. It met the opposition of Democrats and many moderate Republicans who saw the proposal as one that would have increased the power of the right wingers who control the central committee. The bill died in the Senate State Affairs Committee.

Hall said the movement was to assure that "only true Republicans" would win committee endorsement.

Actually, the plan could backfire. Many of the moderate and independent Republicans might vote against the so-called "endorsed true Republican" candidate to show their independence.

The proposal was first tried in the Idaho Legislature 20 years ago and was discarded after one election.

It was in 1964 that the law was in force to require 25 percent endorsement by party convention delegates for congressional candidates.

It is recalled that Dick Smith, prominent Rexburg farmer and then a state senator, was the heavy favorite to win the top endorsement. He did so, but the Alameda mayor, George Vernon Hansen, also sought the convention backing. He had a difficult time, but a few delegates from Bonneville and Bear Lake counties gave him enough votes at the last minute to get the endorsement as the third candidate.

Even though Smith was the heavy favorite among the Republican leaders, Hansen won the primary and then went on to win the general election. He subsequently served seven terms and is still around as a possible contender. Alameda was subsquently annexed as part of Pocatello.

Shortly after that the Legislature eliminated the convention endorsement rule and adopted the free-for-all primary elections that are in force today.

Olsen and the Idaho Republican Central Committee mounted another effort in 1979 to re-enact the convention endorsement. That was after six candidates vied for the Republican gubernatorial nomination. A former state legislator, Vernon Ravenscroft, was the choice among most party leaders to become the nominee. However, the six candidates split the vote so badly that the House majority leader, Allan F. Larsen, Blackfoot farmer, won the nomination.

The Republican Party was so badly divided after that internecine battle that the Democrat nominee, John V. Evans, soundly trounced Larsen in the general election and has held the post ever since.

Hall said northern Idaho Republicans are particularly concerned that members of the Aryan Nations, a white supremacist group, will run for political office as Republicans. In eastern Idaho, he said, Democrats may run for offices as Republicans knowing they can't get elected as Democrats, and then act like Democrats. Of course, that would taint Republicans of the Blake Hall ilk.

Such statements only reflect the high handed attitude by Hall and his henchmen and should be treated as such by the rank and file of Republican voters.