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Proposals underscore GOP's platform

Measure by measure, delegates to Idaho's 2010 Republican Convention on Friday cemented their place at the head of the nation's stalwart conservatives.

More than three dozen proposals, emerging from separate resolution, rules and party platform committees at this biennial event where the state's dominant party sets its compass for the next two years, still must win approval today when all 508 registered delegates are due to vote on them.

Even if just half survive to become part of the Idaho Republican Party's manifesto, they'll still underscore what's become a political fact of life: Following the 2008 convention in Sandpoint where Ron Paul Republicans made a raucous entry onto the scene, this conservative faction is now established at the tiller of the state GOP's inner circle.

One resolution favors establishing an independent Idaho militia, free of federal tethers. A platform plank would define marriage as between a "naturally born" man and woman, barring transgender individuals -- and going further than a 2006 state constitutional amendment.

Another would make GOP candidates sign a loyalty oath to the party platform -- or disclose where they differ. "Look at the resolutions this year," said Greg Collett, a delegate from Canyon County. "These would not have been passed two years ago."

Again and again, convention committee members from as far north as the Canadian border to the remote, Mormon-dominated mountain-and-lake region of the deep southeast pushed through measures that trumpeted their right-leaning principles.

With them, they carried pocket copies of the U.S. Constitution -- and libertarian-leaning Texas congressman Paul's book, "End the Fed" to abolish the U.S. Federal Reserve. One woman's shirt read, "I like being conservative."

They backed measures meant to put their money -- or their silver and gold, as it were -- where their mouths were. "Let free Idahoans pay taxes, and other fees due to the State, County and City in silver and or gold in any form," read one resolution now awaiting today's vote.

To be sure, there was grumbling among those who in 2008 might have been known as mainstream Republicans, when the Sandpoint convention proved the downfall of then-Chairman Kirk Sullivan, a vaunted fundraiser ousted by lawyer and lobbyist Norm Semanko.

"I don't understand the point of this," said Phil Hardy, an Ada County delegate whose day job is communications adviser to the majority caucus in the Idaho Senate.

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But Hardy -- again and again -- found himself on the losing side. One conservative delegate said only Ada and Twin Falls counties brought with them to Idaho Falls members of the old-guard Republican establishment.

"Other than those two counties, I'd say conservatives have been successful getting their (delegates) here without a fight," said Larry Spencer, from Bonner County in northern Idaho.

Spencer went further: U.S. Rep. Mike Simpson, due to speak today, "is not much of a Republican," he said.

Simpson has fallen out with hardcore conservatives over his stances on the 2008 Wall Street bailout -- he backed it -- and a wilderness plan for central Idaho.

Among other resolutions, Idaho residents would send their federal tax payments to the state, which would pay for only mandates covered by the U.S. Constitution. Leftover cash would go back to citizens. The Legislature should nullify President Barack Obama's health care reforms; Arizona's immigration reforms were cheered; and any federal order declaring carbon dioxide a pollutant would be ignored by Idaho as "junk science."

"I find it offensive for people to say things like greenhouse gas is a pollutant," said Lucas Baumbach, a Boise Tea Party activist and delegate from Ada County.

Not everything passed. A measure demanding Republicans reject funding for school-based health clinics that vaccinate children against diseases -- "unnecessary drugging of ... children," the resolution concluded -- was defeated, as was a push that sought to endorse legislation to legalize medical marijuana. And a bid to disband all Idaho public schools "at the earliest possible opportunity" also failed.

"We voted down anything that would have made us look foolish as a party," said Jim Hollingsworth, a delegate from Kootenai County and candidate for state representative. "The rest of them are pretty accurate reflections of Republican values."