

Idahoans need to accept geographical differences

Jun 7, 2006 - Perry Swisher - Pocatello - IDAHO STATE JOURNAL

“It’s not that we’re avoiding College of Southern Idaho. I would consider Twin (Falls) to be a part of Eastern Idaho, and we would welcome people to come to Idaho Falls, if they want to speak about the issue.”

That was how the co-chairman of the legislative interim committee studying a proposed statewide system of community colleges explained holding hearings in Coeur d’Alene and Idaho Falls as well as at the state capital, Boise, but none in Twin Falls, which like Coeur d’Alene, already has a community college.

The co-chair’s name is state Sen. John Goeddes of Coeur d’Alene. We hope he’ll excuse the occasional Southern Idahoan who spells Goeddes without the “o” because over the decades we’ve had a couple of lawmakers from the Southeast who spell it that way.

It’s lack of familiarity that leads Idahoans from one part of the state to make mistaken assumptions about another corner. For example, only a relative handful of Southeastern and Upper Snake (or “Eastern”) Idahoans have been as far north as Coeur d’Alene, compared to the thousands who, with their whole families, have visited Disneyland in Southern California.

A few more of us southerners know Coeur d’Alene and the rest of the panhandle tend to refer to themselves as North Idahoans, as they distinguish themselves from people just to the south of them but still in the north — occupants of the Palouse, with its University of Idaho campus, and of the Clearwater River Valley and of the Camas Prairie (Idaho has two Camas Prairies, the other one being around Fairfield in south-central Idaho.)

In the era when Idaho became a territory, whittled soon thereafter on behalf of symmetry for what were in the process of becoming the states of Wyoming, Montana and Washington, so few people lived in and spoke up on behalf of what would eventuate as the state of Idaho that, residually, the boundaries would traverse half a dozen major watersheds and as many long mountain ranges.

Today we’d have to say the national Congress did so with almost no regard for the settlers, how they’d ever get together, and what they would call each other when they did.

As it is, Idaho shares tributaries of the Snake River with five other states, splits the Bear Lake with Utah, and the Bitterroot, Beaverhead and other land ranges with Montana, the Grand Tetons with Wyoming.

And, with 116 years of statehood, this coming Independence Day week, no truly statewide highway connects north and south. Possible exceptions are Delaware and Rhode Island, or Hawaii and Alaska, whose limitations were oceanic and continental. But every state must live with complaints about the boundaries that separate a Salt Lake Basin from a lotteries-dangling Preston or a speed-reared Montana citizenry from the beet trucks of Rexburg.

We should grin and bear it, tell our territorial anecdotes, and go ahead and be sensible about differences within the same jurisdiction.

Meanwhile, we shouldn’t tick off other Idahoans by not knowing who they are. What that leads to — well, Texas can’t appreciate its northern neighbors calling it Baja Oklahoma.

Y’all get our drift?

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