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## Allred closes one void, creates another

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Idaho politics faced a void until Keith Allred stepped up to fill it.

Last week, Allred - the former Harvard University professor and activist - stunned the state by announcing he would run as the Democratic candidate for governor, challenging Republican incumbent C. L. (Butch) Otter.

Voters now have a choice.

Perhaps they agree with Otter that government must live within its means. Possibly they share the House GOP leadership's view that taxes are too high and that programs from schools and higher education to transportation or social are a burden.

That's the conventional wisdom in this reliably Republican state.

Or just maybe Idahoans have entered their 15th year of single-party rule wondering if the GOP is so busy fighting itself that it has lost track of them. It's possible they're fatigued with a governing philosophy that says investments in their education system must be slashed while tax breaks for big business retain their priority.

If anyone can bring that message home, it's Allred. Almost the antithesis of Otter, Allred likes to get his mind around complex, policy questions. He's a digger and he likes details. He's been called the wonk's wonk. And he's passionate about empowering the political center.

A native of Twin Falls, Allred holds a bachelor's degree in American history from Stanford University and a doctorate from UCLA in organizational behavior and social psychology. He taught for seven years on the faculty of the Harvard Kennedy School of Government. He has a special talent for dispute mediation.

Allred returned home and launched the Common Interest in 2005, a nonpartisan citizen activist organization that delved into issues and sought to give the reasonable middle a voice in Boise.

In that role, Allred offered a counter-balance to the special interest lobbies that dominate the state Capitol. The Common Interest has been an antidote to the toxin of partisanship.

Earlier this year, it was Allred who spotted a \$10 million error in a state transportation funding bill. Characteristically, he gave the transportation department early warning rather than capitalizing on it himself.

Allred lent credibility to those who argued Idaho passenger car and small truck drivers were paying more than their share for highway maintenance while the heavy truck industry was paying less than it should.

He lost the battle to raise state taxes on beer and wine, which hadn't been adjusted for inflation for more than 30 years. A powerful lobby thwarted his efforts, but Allred may have laid the foundation for changes to come.

Allred persuaded lawmakers to index Idaho's the homeowners exemption to the rate of inflation. Until then, the property tax break first passed in the early 1980s had eroded with rising property values.

Allred and the Common Interest also came to the defense of Idaho's substance abuse treatment programs, making the case on the basis of economy. Spend a dollar on those programs now and reap the savings that come from a smaller prison population, Allred argued.

And in the midst of Republican squabbling about whether to close their party's primary elections to registered party members, Allred remained engaged with alternatives seeking to preserve the prerogatives of independent voters.

But Allred's candidacy also carries a sacrifice.

It's a trade-off between having a competitive, political debate for Idaho's top office and losing an independent voice in the Statehouse.

Having jumped into gubernatorial politics, Allred forfeits his nonpartisan credentials. Finding a serious candidate for governor was challenging enough. Finding another activist to replace him won't be any easier. - M.T.