

THE CARLSON CHRONICLE

Baloo, the Friendly Bear, Enters

Most baby boomers can recall the Walt Disney adaptation of Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. It was a delightful, full length animated movie with the usual contest between the good characters and the bad characters (remember the giant cobra?). Of course good always triumphs over evil.

Idaho Democrats at last have a candidate for governor---Boise businessman and long-time school district board member, A. J. Balukoff. Yes, the easiest way to pronounce his name is to remember Baloo, the friendly bear. Democrats are hoping Idahoans will be drawn to one of the first of the baby boomer generation much as people were drawn to the Disney character.

This column six months ago put in print that "Baloo" would be the Democratic nominee.

He could ignore my column, but a month later when the alpha-wolf of Idaho political journalists, the *Idaho Statesman's* Dan Popkey, bannered his probable candidacy on the front page, he had to acknowledge he was taking a serious look at entering the race.

Several questions immediately come to mind: what took him so long to get around to announcing? Given his acknowledged expertise on education matters, why governor instead of State Superintendent of Public Instruction? With no political experience other than 16 years on the Boise school board, why does he think he can start at the top of the Idaho political food chain?

Most importantly, though, will he open his own checkbook (He clearly is a very successful businessman) and will his wife (She is reportedly the sole heir to the Skaggs Drugstore chain) open hers in order to buy the kind of statewide name recognition he needs to be a serious challenger to Republican gubernatorial hegemony.

One can safely presume he starts with the narrow hard-core Democratic base in Idaho of 30% of the vote. His challenge is to make himself known well enough to be viewed by many of the hard core 40% Republican base and the 30% that are true independents as a credible alternative to a charming but do-nothing governor who literally brags about taking a billion dollars out of

state spending and ignores how badly educational support has been eviscerated on his watch.

To make up for lost time and for not being a household name, “Baloo” is going to have to buy name identification quickly. To do that he needs to spend their money first and hope he generates enough buzz to jump-start fund-raising that will eventually enable him to repay the loan to his campaign.

If he is truly serious he will invest initially at least a million and a half dollars in a series of television, radio, cable and social media purchases to introduce himself to Idahoans. While the video he has on his website is a nice start he has to take his story to the voters, he cannot expect them automatically to be driven to his website.

One hopes he spent the past six months nailing down a campaign manager, putting together a campaign team, drawing up a good baseline poll to measure their progress against, developing a strategic game plan, starting the process of identifying where the 50% plus one of the voters are that could give him victory, putting together a finance committee to help pay for it, and undergoing a media training regimen that will enable him to stay on message.

Candidly, he also has to be prepared to deal with the fact that few if any evangelical Christians will consider voting for him. As Mitt Romney found out, many Evangelicals view Mormonism as a cult. Baloo (a graduate of BYU), his wife and family are all practicing members of the LDS Church. It is no coincidence that the only Mormon ever elected governor in Idaho, John Evans, was viewed as a “Jack Mormon.”

Questions aside, Baloo’s kick-off appeared to go well. Restoring education to its priority position within Idaho as is mandated in the State Constitution is indeed the best issue to hold Republicans feet to the fire, whether the nominee is a governor that has done nothing to earn a third term or a Tea Party candidate with 18th century views.

Baloo does have a story to tell, from his solid commitment to public education to his record of business success to his clearly living and walking family values.

One final question: if you win, without the ability to sustain a veto, how do you propose to work your will on a Legislature still full of Republican troglodytes and Tea Party types hell bent on eviscerating education further by using the \$70 million dollar surplus to pass along additional unneeded property tax relief rather than starting to reinvest in education?

You sure you shouldn't have filed for the SPI post?