

How Nels Mitchell can make it a race

Chris Carlson/Carlson Chronicles

Because Idaho is considered the most Republican state in the nation few political prognosticators, whether in Idaho or the nation's capital, believe Boise attorney Nels Mitchell has a snowball's chance of defeating the long-serving Republican officeholder.

There's one big caveat, though, and that comes down to a question of money, as in: Can Mitchell raise enough to pound away on three vulnerabilities for which Sen. Jim Risch has no adequate response? If Mitchell can get the funding to saturate the major television markets with good ads exposing these "wounds," at a minimum he can make what many expect to be a runaway Risch victory into a much narrower race.

Here are three concepts for 60-second ads the Mitchell people ought to fine-tune and run:

Ad No. 1: "You pay more taxes, Risch pays less."

"Recall, folks, 2006 when then-Gov. Risch sold the Legislature a bill of goods about switching the one-quarter of public school funding that comes from property taxes to an increase in the sales tax.

"He claimed public education would lose nothing. He was wrong - they lost \$50 million and the evisceration of public school funding in Idaho accelerated significantly. Idaho's per-pupil spending now is 50th out of 51 states and the District of Columbia, behind even Mississippi.

"Risch claimed no personal benefit from the switch. In a one-day special legislative session in August, while most Idahoans were enjoying vacations, he rammed through the Legislature a bill he knew would lower his Idaho property taxes by at least \$4,000. He remained silent about his break while the vast majority got the shaft.

"He said if it could be proven he benefitted personally he would drop out of the race. The proof was submitted, but he's still sitting in the Senate.

"You can't afford Jim Risch and Idahoans can't trust Jim Risch. I'm Nels Mitchell and I authorized this message."

Ad No. 2 "Arrogance."

"There is only one word that describes it: arrogance. In a December 2012 interview with the Idaho Statesman, Sen. Jim Risch said there was no sense working hard in Washington, D.C., because everything is so partisan only grid-lock thrives.

"He literally said the job was easy and he could coast forever unlike the seven months he spent as governor, which was hard and draining work.

"Idahoans expect high public elected officials to solve problems. Risch says they aren't solvable so sit back, relax and in effect play the fiddle while Rome burns. Idaho needs a working senator. I'm Nels Mitchell. I authorized this ad because I want to work for you."

Ad No. 3 "Junketing Jim."

"While almost all Idaho families struggle to make ends meet, multi-millionaire Jim Risch globe-trots around the world on your dime or a special interest's. After all, he's on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Even his chief of staff has to take his own junkets.

"Meanwhile he votes no on increased funding for programs like Food Stamps, and no on extending benefits for the unemployed. After all, he has his nest feathered - he's in the top 15 of the list of the wealthiest members of Congress.

"Ask yourself this: Just what has Junketing Jim done for you lately? I'm Nels Mitchell and I authorized this ad."

Here's hoping Mitchell can raise the funds to saturate the air waves with messages like these. There's a reason why most folks, even some good Republicans, don't care for Risch or his politics of exclusion and self-service.

Go get him, Nels. Given a credible alternative, the voters may finally be tired of not having a senator that works.

Carlson is a retired journalist who served as press secretary to former Idaho Gov. Cecil D. Andrus. He lives in Medimont in Kootenai County.