

## To Fix the Economy, Get Back to Basics

By A.J. Balukoff

A former executive with an Idaho-based Fortune 500 company's technology division recently visited my office. He talked about how, after years of struggling to recruit qualified employees to Idaho, the company decided to leave the state. In all the years they were here, they never heard from one state elected or economic official. No one asked how the state could help keep those high-paying jobs in Idaho.

He said our state government has failed Idaho businesses, workers, and communities because our elected leaders just don't get it: "The people in the seats of power have set the state back 25 years."

He's right.

In my business ventures, success occurs when you follow basic rules: Invest in the future, use resources efficiently, and hire and keep the best people.

Under the state's current leadership, **our economy has plummeted**. Education investment has been cut drastically. Corporate tax-break gimmicks have not created good jobs. Idaho's national image has been tarnished. State economic policies have created a low-skill, low-wage economy. Today, Idaho's families work harder for less. Nearly half of Idaho's school-age children are eligible for a reduced-price or free school lunch—10 percent higher than when Butch Otter took office nearly eight years ago.

As I see it, we need to get back to the basics to move our economy forward.

### 1. Invest in education

We must adequately invest in both in K-12 and in our colleges and universities, which suffered the sixth-deepest cuts in the nation under Gov. Otter. Within five years, that investment will produce graduates who are better prepared for today's high-skill, high-paying jobs.

Over the next decade, our education investment will deliver the workers needed by businesses. We must partner businesses with universities so that graduates meet business needs. High-quality public schools will help entice high-skill workers to bring their families to Idaho.

### 2. Help existing businesses grow

While importing new businesses is important, 80 percent of Idaho's new job creation comes from existing businesses. Idaho is a top-five state for business birth rate, but also for business mortality rate. We can increase survival rates by working closely with businesses during the crucial first three to 10 years. My administration will listen to businesses and invest in our economy to ensure that we have reliable roads and bridges, high-speed rural broadband, and tax policies that truly create jobs without harming schools or essential needs. Idaho prospers when businesses and families grow together, and my administration will be committed to getting us on the right track.

### 3. Building a better Idaho brand

The governor should be Idaho's best ambassador. The GOP likes to talk about social issues that "threaten families." Do you know what *really* threatens Idaho families? Not having money for food, clothing and rent. Rather than uniting people, Gov. Otter drives wedges between them—just look at the state of the Republican Party right now.

My opponent has perpetrated the stereotype that Idaho is a backwater haven for political extremists. His divisive policies have driven Idaho to the bottom economically. Inadequate education investment and a national media spotlight on our foibles are bad for business. A governor should know that.

I offer Idahoans, and especially our kids, a better future. Idaho can no longer be led with a romantic vision of a past that no longer exists. I will lead Idaho with honesty, guide us past our differences, and find values that unite us—you can bet that makes a difference in how companies perceive our state. I pledge to lead Idaho back to economic prosperity.

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