

# Time for Balukoff to take off the gloves

**Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune**

To win their support, Democrat A.J. Balukoff first must persuade Idaho voters to fire Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter.

So far, Balukoff has refused to take that step. And until he does, he'll be forfeiting whatever chance he has of winning.

A challenger's path is well-worn:

- Tell them who you are.
- Tell them to show the incumbent the door.
- Give them your vision for moving in a new direction.

The independently wealthy Balukoff has taken the first step in spades. The Center for Public Integrity says he has spent more than \$500,000 on TV ads compared to nearly \$121,000 for Otter.

But Otter remains poised to win a third term in a state that reflexively votes for Republican incumbents. Earlier this month, a poll conducted by YouGov, the New York Times and CBS News put Otter at 51 percent to Balukoff's 33 percent.

Despite being a relative political neophyte, Balukoff knows all this. He's more or less being told his next salvo of commercials should follow these lines:

- "Your kids are being left behind in the most under-funded schools in the United States. Gov. Otter cares more about delivering tax cuts for the well-off than whether your child has a shot at a decent education."
- "Under Gov. Otter, Idaho is dead last in median income for women and near the top for minimum wages. Unless something changes, more of us will live in poverty four years from now. Ask yourself: Do you really trust Idaho with your son or daughter's future? Or do you privately fear they'll have to find a better life in another state?"
- "Gov. Otter permitted his political cronies at Corrections Corporation of America to undermine security within the prison walls and compromise public safety on the outside - all the while defrauding you of untold millions of tax dollars. Rather than looking out for you, Otter's political appointee protected CCA by stopping an investigation."
- "Idaho's two-term tradition was good enough for Gov. Dirk Kempthorne. Gov. John Evans stood for election twice. Gov. Phil Batt served one term. Even Gov. Cecil Andrus took a break, serving no more than two consecutive terms. What makes Butch Otter think he's so indispensable?"

Taking the message to Otter is not being negative. It's seizing the momentum.

The alternative is to permit Otter - and his proxies at the Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry's Idaho Prosperity Fund - to define Balukoff as a liberal, as one of President Obama's ideological toadies, as a threat to gun ownership rights and a candidate who is outside Idaho's cultural mainstream.

Reminding voters that Otter owns

Idaho's abysmal economy is not getting in the mud.

Pointing out the Republican record of raiding education budgets is not crossing the line.

And asking Idahoans to explore the depths of their "Otter fatigue" is perfectly legitimate considering this is the first time since 1962 they have been asked to hand a sitting governor a third term.

That is what politics is about - drawing distinctions.

Idahoans are waiting to hear it.

The election is less than six weeks away.

People are starting to make up their minds.

Absentee balloting is beginning.

Every day that A.J. Balukoff refuses to take off the gloves is a good day for Butch Otter. - M.T.