

# Coeur d'Alene legislator faces challenger who hopes to defund Idaho budget of federal money

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As he seeks a third term in the Legislature, Rep. Luke Malek, R-Coeur d'Alene, faces a challenge from a local real estate attorney who's gone on the attack – criticizing Malek as too young and inexperienced to represent Coeur d'Alene in the Legislature.

Malek, 34, who this year opened his own law firm and who's a former Kootenai County deputy prosecutor, has faced that same criticism from GOP challenger Art Macomber repeatedly, including in public candidate forums.

“He hasn't built anything in his life to speak of, including a family, a business, or anything else,” Macomber said.

Malek said Macomber is wrong about his experience.

“Most of what he's saying is not relevant to representing the people of Coeur d'Alene in the Legislature,” Malek said.

Malek points to an array of accomplishments in his first two terms in the House, including sponsoring legislation to spur broadband expansion into rural Idaho; securing a mental health crisis center for Coeur d'Alene; spearheading a new four-year college degree program in computer science through North Idaho College and the University of Idaho that students can earn without leaving Coeur d'Alene; and successfully sponsoring long-sought legislation this year to ensure firefighters can get worker's compensation coverage when they get cancer from substances they breathe while inside burning buildings.

“I think there's more to do in the realms in which I've been focused,” he said. “Obviously education is No. 1. There's more to be done on the job creation front and dealing with health care. The reason I'm running hasn't changed from term to term – I just want to make the community a better place to raise my family.”

Macomber, 60, says he's better equipped to represent Coeur d'Alene in the Legislature.

“I don't think there's a particular age, but I think there's a particular bank of experience that if you have it, you're more likely to succeed,” he said.

Macomber cites his private-sector experience. He worked for Micron Electronics in Nampa for five years, and before that, as a Realtor, a carpenter, and a Pacific Bell employee in California. He earned his law degree from the University of California Hastings College of Law in 2003, and moved to Coeur d'Alene in 2006; he's been married for 24 years and has two children.

The average age of Idaho legislators is 63 – the second oldest of any state, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

“I think that my generation, my contemporaries, have a perspective that needs to be heard in the Legislature as well,” said Malek, who is among the youngest of Idaho’s lawmakers.

Malek, who holds a law degree from the University of Idaho, co-founded the Kootenai County Young Professionals organization. He’s been a construction worker, regional director for then-Idaho Gov. Jim Risch, executive director of the Post Falls Urban Renewal Agency, and director of legal affairs for Heritage Health, a position he’s continued by contract since he opened Smith + Malek Law Firm in Coeur d’Alene last year.

In the Idaho House, Malek serves on the budget-writing Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee, and the Judiciary and Local Government committees.

Macomber says if elected, his top priority will be to eliminate the 36 percent of total state spending that comes from federal funds. “There has to be a period of time when we grow our economy to a point where we can at least get to where we are today with 100 percent of our budget being Idaho money,” he said, adding, “It’d be of course better if we could have a surplus.”

Asked if that wouldn’t leave Idahoans still paying federal taxes but not getting anything back, Macomber said, “The money’s not really there. It’s fake money. It doesn’t exist. It’s debt for our grandkids.” He added, “The idea that there’s present-day value to the money they’re giving us instead of future-day debt is a misapprehension.”

Malek said that Macomber’s desire to stop accepting federal money is “completely unrealistic.”

“Tell somebody who paid their federal taxes on April 15 that’s not real money going out the door,” he said, “I think he has no idea what kind of tax burden it would cause Idahoans to let the rest of the country have the tax dollars that they pay into the federal system.”

Macomber said he’s been walking precincts in District 4 since October – including the whole time Malek was in Boise for the legislative session.

“I do think the electorate is coming around up here to a belief that I probably am a better person to address these issues than the incumbent,” he said. “I just hear it.”

The district also has two other contested races, one on the Democratic side for the same seat for which Malek and Macomber are facing off, and one on the GOP side for the district’s other legislative seat, now held by third-term Rep. Kathy Sims, R-Coeur d’Alene.

The two Democrats are Patrick Mitchell, a freelance marketer who was born and raised in Coeur d’Alene and has run unsuccessfully for mayor and the city council; and “Turns to the East,” who was known as Charles Russell Addy before he legally changed his name in a Unitarian church

ceremony in 1994. East is a former customs and border protection officer on the Washington-Canada border, who moved to Coeur d'Alene two years ago for semi-retirement.

In the GOP race for House Seat B, Sims, 73, owner of the Coeur d'Alene Honda dealership and a former county Republican Party chair, faces a challenge from political newcomer Paul Amador, 34, director of program planning and development for the University of Idaho in Coeur d'Alene. Amador moved to North Idaho four years ago, where his wife, Julie, has family; he has a doctorate in educational leadership, and co-owns a consulting business and a small family farm.

Amador cites Sims' votes against four of the seven bills making up the public school budget as among the reasons he decided to run.

"She has not, in my view, provided any alternative to that," he said.

He also differed with Sims' vote against the North Idaho mental health crisis center, and said he's hearing frustration with how she's representing the district.

"I think we can do better," he said.

Sims is seeking her fourth term in the House. A critic of urban renewal laws and of the local redevelopment agency, she is vice chair of the House Local Government Committee. Sims also serves on the Judiciary and State Affairs committees.

Sims said she counts among her accomplishments getting legislation passed this year to bring back a tuition work-off program for massage therapy students that allows them to graduate with less student debt. She's also hoping to reintroduce her proposal for a state tax break for retired veterans next year if re-elected.

"I don't have anything other than the desire to return to Boise and to help the folks that sent me."