

THE COMMON INTEREST

Government by the People

December 10, 2009

Dear _____

I have major news to share with you. **I'm running for Governor.**

The fundamental motivation driving this decision is to amplify the efforts we've been making together over the last five years to put practical solutions ahead of special interest and partisan politics.

In conjunction with our fifth anniversary, as you know, I've been working on our vision for the future. With our board of directors, I arrived at the following vision in October.

THE COMMON INTEREST'S VISION

To be a potent and respected force for putting practical solutions ahead of special interest and partisan politics in all 50 states and at the federal level by 2026, our nation's 250th anniversary.

Since that time, I've been doing more detailed strategic planning for how we realize this bold vision. I saw credible paths by which we could get there that I was excited to pursue, but it was clear that it would be a significant challenge. The 5th Anniversary videos we've been producing are about putting us on this exciting path.

A New Path for Advancing Our Bold Vision Presents Itself

A few weeks ago, Betty Richardson asked if she could have a conversation with Christine and me about running for governor. Because Betty chairs the committee charged with recruiting the Democratic party's candidate for governor, and because the vision that I'm so passionate about is so non-partisan, my strong inclination was that this was not the right path. Christine and I agreed that we would have an initial conversation with her but only with the clear understanding that our heavy presumption was that we would say no.

My intention was to raise the most fundamental reason for not running at the very beginning of that conversation. Before I could do that, Betty started by saying that she understood what she was asking and why we would be strongly inclined to say no. She assured us that her expectation was that I would campaign and govern just as I had led The Common Interest. She said that it was that work that attracted the party to me as a candidate and that they didn't want me to change that. Rather, she said, the party wanted to embrace that approach.

Honestly, this was a surprise to me. When Dan Popkey was doing his piece on us for the Idaho Statesman in 2006, he asked me if I had any interest in running for office. I told him that the core motivation that drives me is the independent-minded pursuit of putting practical solutions ahead special interest and partisan politics. I explained to Dan that I could see no way that either party would embrace such a candidacy and

that I saw no realistic way to run as an independent. If there were a way to run and win with my approach, I said, I would certainly be interested.

The conversation with Betty began to change that core assumption about why my independent-minded approach was not viable in elective politics. Christine and I deliberated and prayed for several days about whether we should seriously consider what Betty was suggesting. We concluded that it would be worth having additional conversations with Democratic party leaders to see if they felt about my potential candidacy the way Betty did. A string of many remarkable conversations followed in which party leader after party leader expressed great respect for what we have accomplished at The Common Interest and genuine enthusiasm for me campaigning and governing that way.

Why I've Chosen this New Path

Upon further reflection, it became clear to me and Christine that becoming governor on these terms would be a remarkable way of demonstrating not only to Idahoans but also to all Americans that there is a better way to lead in our system of government. We realized that it would be the most powerful route available to advance the vision of making The Common Interest a potent force in all 50 states and at the federal level by the time of our nation's 250th anniversary.

Let me be clear that when I say that I would govern as I have led The Common Interest, I mean that quite literally. Let me illustrate what I mean with a concrete example. A few years ago, our membership overwhelmingly endorsed the idea that we take a comprehensive and proactive look at all the tax breaks in Idaho Code. The idea was to investigate whether we could close many of those tax breaks in order to reduce substantially the tax rate that all of us pay.

Imagine doing this same work together with me in the governor's office. I would convene a task force to examine the pros and cons of each tax break, drawing on the substantial work done on this by previous task forces and interim committees. That work would be captured in policy briefs just like those that The Common Interest currently produces. When we had broad consensus that we had fairly captured the issues, I would ask a random sample of thousands of registered voters to review the brief and weigh in. I would then advocate energetically for those measures supported by a large majority Idahoans, including Republicans, Democrats, and independents.

Following The Common Interest approach in this way would not only give us a reliable means of identifying the measures that are genuinely in The Common Interest. It would also be a powerful means by which we could advance those policies in the Legislature. Imagine the possibilities of a governor joining with the hundreds of citizens in each legislative district who had weighed in on a particular measure to pass such legislation.

Proposals identified and passed in such a way could be a powerful force for making ours truly a system by and for the people. Think of the tax break example. Particularly in our current economic climate with the highest unemployment in decades, there are few ways that state government could more effectively spur the generation of new jobs. The evidence is overwhelming that the vast majority of new jobs and economic growth is generated by small business. Yet it is not Idaho's many small business owners who seek tax breaks. They don't have the time or wherewithal

to pursue them in our complicated system; other powerful interests do even though they don't produce nearly as many new jobs as small businesses. When the legislature passes these tax breaks it substitutes its judgment about tomorrow's winners in our economy for the market's judgment. Consequently, we routinely saddle the portion of the economy that produces more jobs with a heavier tax burden in order to lighten the burden on powerful interests that produce fewer jobs. Together, we could rewrite this old story of the government doing the bidding of special interests. Imagine that together we overcame special interest influence to close tax breaks so that we could substantially cut the taxes that all of us pay. The result would be tax fairness and vigorous job creation by an unbridled small business sector.

I have to tell you that my blood begins pumping even as I write these words to you. And that's just the single example of applying our approach to tax policy. My excitement surges to new heights as I think about taking this same approach in other areas. For example, imagine a similar process to identify the most cost effective means by which we could improve K-12 education in our state.

As exciting as the prospects are for identifying and passing practical solutions that advance Idahoans' common interests, however, I get truly charged about demonstrating to the good citizens of our state and our nation how, together, we can realize the full potential of the remarkable system of government by the people that our Founding Fathers deeded to us. James Madison powerfully articulated in Federalist #10 and #51 the main reason our constitution established separation of powers and checks and balances. Madison explains that they structured our system this way because it would mean that measures that were able to attract broad support across partisan and special interest lines will have a better chance of prevailing in this complicated system than those measures that draw narrow support because they are not in the common interest.

What's Next

There are important additional details to share with you about what this means for The Common Interest organization in the future. I will share those with you in additional e-mails in the near future.

Today, I am filing the initial papers paving the way for my candidacy. Within a few weeks there will be a formal announcement.

For now, I wanted to share this news with you first. Although I didn't anticipate this new path, it is the work that you and I have done together through The Common Interest that has brought me to this point. Ours is a relationship that I have cherished. Most of all, I wanted you to be the first to know that I've decided to run for governor because it is the most powerful means by which I can work with you and all Idahoans to realize the full promise of the inspired founding of our remarkable nation.

I hope that you'll share with me your thoughts and advice about this decision.

Warm Regards,

Keith
