

## **Idaho Supreme Court candidate taps former disgraced lawmaker**

By KIMBERLEE KRUESI, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho Supreme Court candidate Curt McKenzie has hired former state Sen. John McGee — who resigned several years ago following highly publicized scandals — to help with his campaign.

McKenzie, a Republican senator, says McGee is a longtime friend and is proud to have him part of the team.

McGee and his wife are assisting with McKenzie's campaign communications and personally helping him on the campaign trail.

McGee quit the Legislature amid sexual harassment allegations in 2012. A female staffer accused the married lawmaker of propositioning her for sex and subjecting her to unwanted sexual advances. The Republican lawmaker stepped down before the Idaho Senate ethics committee could conduct an investigation. He later pleaded guilty to disturbing the peace — a charge Idaho state police said stemmed from the sexual misconduct allegations, and served 39 days in jail.

The accusation was preceded by a 2011 Father's Day arrest on drunken driving charges after police pulled him over in a car that didn't belong to him after a night of drinking at a golf tournament in Boise. He pleaded guilty, had his license suspended and was ordered to pay a fine and restitution for damage to the vehicle.

After lying low for two years, McGee became chairman of the Downtown Caldwell Organization in southwestern Idaho. The group focuses on revitalizing downtown Caldwell to attract businesses.

"As we move forward, (McGee's past) has nothing to do with this," McKenzie said. "I'm glad to call him a friend."

Idaho Supreme Court justices are nonpartisan elected positions. Four candidates are currently vying for an open seat after Chief Justice Jim Jones announced he

isn't running for a third term: McKenzie, Robyn Brody, Clive Strong and Sergio Gutierrez. Candidates are bound by strict campaign rules to prevent showing political bias.

McKenzie's hire has raised eyebrows, but in Idaho's close-knit political world, almost all campaigns are surrounded by well-connected advisers with partisan ties.

Brody, an attorney from Rupert, has hired Republican campaign consultant Jason Lehosit to help her first-ever campaign. Lehosit, known for his ability to connect GOP hopefuls with donors, ran into trouble with the law several years back after getting his fourth DUI and violating his parole. Despite the legal tussles, candidates from Idaho's dominant Republican Party have continued to professionally embrace the political operator.

Meanwhile, Strong — a longtime deputy attorney general — has hired Melinda Northern to help handle his campaigns communications. Northern helped Superintendent of Public School Instruction Sherri Ybarra win the statewide office after the first-time political candidate decided to run in a crowded four-way race in 2014.

The campaign treasurer for Gutierrez, a judge for the Idaho Court of Appeals, did not immediately return requests for comment.

Candidates will need to secure a majority of the vote in the May 17 election. If not, then the top two candidates will compete in a runoff election in November