



C.L. "BUTCH" OTTER  
GOVERNOR

## OPINION

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# **THOUSANDS OF IDAHOANS EXPRESS THEIR CIVIC VIRTUE BY VOLUNTEERING FOR PUBLIC SERVICE**

*By Governor C.L. "Butch" Otter*

If you've ever heard me speak or read something I've written, you likely have noticed the phrase "civic virtue" popping up from time to time. I use the term a lot because it captures so well what I see every day in communities throughout Idaho.

Civic virtue lacks the nationalistic connotations of "patriotism," but it also goes somewhat beyond the kind of active citizenship that impels people to vote, attend an occasional public meeting or even participate in charitable activities. Civic virtue speaks to a selfless commitment that involves devoting time, energy and resources to the larger and more inclusive needs of our society, and to a form of government truly of, by and for the people it serves.

Opportunities to express civic virtue abound in Idaho. In our State government alone there are more than 200 boards and commissions that rely on volunteers to fill almost 1,500 mostly unpaid positions – from the Alfalfa and Clover Seed Commission to the Workforce Development Council. That's to say nothing of the many regional, county, city and even neighborhood associations, boards, commissions, councils and committees whose responsibilities are daily being met by men and women who simply want to do their part.

Volunteering with likeminded citizens for good and necessary causes is a long and cherished tradition extending throughout the United States and back to the foundations of our republic. French historian and philosophe Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in his landmark 1835 book *Democracy in America* that "Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. ... I have often admired the extreme skill with which the inhabitants of the United States succeed in proposing a common object for the exertions of a great many men and in inducing them voluntarily to pursue it."

What's unique about Idaho – attributable in part to geography, culture and social disposition – is that so many of us volunteer so readily and cheerfully to bring our various talents to bear on what matters most to us, often at significant personal sacrifice. Nowhere is that more true than in our justice system. Local magistrate commissions, the Idaho Judicial Council and even our courts would be unable to perform their duties without the help of those who could instead be using their time and expertise for their own direct benefit.

Yes, our judges get paid. But in many if not most cases the attorneys who accept positions on the bench do so at the expense of far more lucrative ventures in the private or corporate practice of law. Of course some do it at least in part for the professional and social prestige involved, but most seek to become judges for deeper, more personal reasons. They believe in the concept of justice. They love and respect the rule of law and its administration. They have civic virtue.

Right now we are preparing to add three new district judge positions in the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> judicial districts to help carry the growing caseload in Idaho courts. The Idaho Judicial Council – another voluntary, unpaid panel – is required to nominate two to four people for each of those positions.

That could be a challenge. But I'm confident that the good people of Idaho, people who know that citizens reap the benefits as well as bear the costs of freedom, will respond as they do every day and in every corner of our state – with great civic virtue.

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