

THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

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County GOP central committee decries one of GOP gov hopefuls

Here's my [full column](#) from Sunday's Spokesman-Review:

By Betsy Z. Russell

The same Kootenai County GOP committee that recently condemned Idaho GOP Sens. Jim Risch and Mike Crapo for backing sanctions against Russia has passed a resolution blasting Tommy Ahlquist, one of the three leading GOP candidates for governor in 2018, for having donated to Democrats, and questioning whether he's really a Republican.

According to state and federal campaign finance records, Ahlquist has donated \$21,975 to Republicans since 2000, and \$8,000 to Democrats, including two nonpartisan city candidates whom the Kootenai County Republican Central Committee noted are known Democrats.

Ahlquist was questioned about the matter during a campaign stop in Lewiston last week, according to the [Lewiston Tribune](#), and said, "I've given a lot more to Republicans."

According to campaign finance records, Ahlquist's \$21,975 in donations to Republicans since 2000 – not counting contributions to his own campaign this year – went to the Idaho Republican Party, \$10,500; Marco Rubio for President, \$5,400; GOP Congressman Mike Simpson, \$2,750; Gov. Butch Otter, \$2,500; Mitt Romney for President, \$500; the Republican National Committee, \$125; State Controller Brandon Woolf, \$100; and, perhaps ironically, Lt. Gov. Brad Little, \$100 in 2014.

Little is among Ahlquist's rivals in the 2018 governor's race, as is 1st District GOP Rep. Raul Labrador.

His donations to Democrats were \$5,000 to A.J. Balukoff, the Democratic candidate for governor, in 2014; \$1,000 each to Boise Mayor Dave Bieter and City Councilor Lauren McLean in 2015, who were seeking re-election to their nonpartisan posts; and \$1,000 to T.J. Thompson in 2016 for the Boise city councilman's unsuccessful run for county commissioner.

In a statement responding to the KCRCC resolution, Ahlquist's campaign manager, David Johnston, said, "It's no surprise that career politicians and their handful of supporters in the Kootenai County party are attacking political outsider Tommy Ahlquist with lies and half truths. These are the same out-of-touch political insiders that attacked Senators Risch and Crapo. Tommy Ahlquist is a conservative Republican who will shake up Boise, and that's exactly what they're afraid of."

Ahlquist has said repeatedly that he donated to Balukoff because he was a personal friend, but voted for Otter, to whom he donated \$2,500 the same year. Ahlquist and Balukoff are both prominent Boise businessmen and members of the Mormon Church.

Alex Barron, KCRCC secretary and the self-styled "bard of the American Redoubt," wrote about Ahlquist in a [Sept. 12 post](#) on his "Charles Carroll Society" website. Citing his 2014 contribution to Balukoff, Barron wrote, "In this case Tommy worked with the socialists AFL-CIO to get a liberal Democrat elected in Idaho." Barron also claimed, "The majority of Tommy Ahlquist political money spent in local Idaho politics has been in support of liberal, open borders, pro-child murder, globalist Democrats."

KCRCC member Duane Rasmussen said he offered an amendment to the resolution. "It's a cardinal sin to contribute to Democrats," Rasmussen said, "and, yeah, I believe that to be the case. However, Trump has also contributed to Democrats. I've been a big supporter of Trump's."

"We oughta give him an opportunity to come up and explain his position," Rasmussen said. "The term I used was he has some 'splaining' to do."

Rasmussen said that after his amendment was rejected, he voted for the resolution, which then passed without objection, "but I'm a little bit concerned." That's because the county central committee doesn't endorse in the primary. "Well, this is like the opposite of an endorsement – it's a negative endorsement, as it were, which works out to be about the same thing."

KCRCC member Bjorn Handeen said the resolution “seems pretty reasonable to me,” and said he thought donations to moderate Republicans were suspect, too. “They all sound like safe, centrist choices to me, and that contradicts his narrative that he’s a conservative Republican,” Sandeen said.

The central committee also passed another resolution at its Sept. 26 meeting, this one calling for the repeal of Idaho’s urban renewal law, saying it “has provided no justifiable benefits.” Urban renewal is the tool Coeur d’Alene has used for everything from redevelopment of popular McEuen Park to its library, Kroc Center and education corridor.

Idahoan to head U.S. Mint

Among the latest nominees President Trump has announced for his administration is an Idahoan, David J. Ryder, who’s been nominated to be director of the U.S. Mint. Ryder, who was born in Billings and raised in Boise, is a Boise State University graduate; he also headed the U.S. Mint under President George H.W. Bush.

Currently, Ryder is managing director of currency for Honeywell Authentication Technologies in New Jersey. He was previously CEO of Secure Products Corporation, which was acquired by Honeywell in 2007. Ryder, whose nomination is subject to Senate confirmation, also previously served as deputy chief of staff to Vice President Dan Quayle.

Another Idahoan, Mary Brooks, was director of the U.S. Mint from 1969 to 1977.

Earlier, Trump nominated Ryan Nelson, general counsel for Melaleuca in Idaho Falls, to be solicitor at the Department of Interior. Nelson’s nomination cleared the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on Sept. 19; it is awaiting a vote of the full Senate.

September revenues up

Idaho’s state tax revenues for September came in 3.6 percent higher than forecast, and 8.2 percent higher than revenues the previous September. That puts state general fund revenue for the fiscal year to date \$29.4 million or 3.4 percent ahead of projections. Individual income tax showed the biggest jump

for the month, coming in 6.2 percent ahead of estimates.

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