

**Testimony of C.L. “Butch” Otter**  
**Governor of Idaho**  
**United States House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Oversight and Government Reform; and**  
**The Speaker’s Task Force on Intergovernmental Affairs**

Thank you Chairman Gowdy, Chairman Bishop, committee members and task force members. My name is Butch Otter and I’m governor of the great state of Idaho. It’s an honor to appear before you to discuss the relationship between our state and federal governments.

I come to you in my 12<sup>th</sup> and final year as governor. I have approximately 313 days, 13 hours and 50 minutes until I leave office ... but who’s counting?

During my tenure there have been three presidential administrations. At times, they have provided me the opportunity to see federalism at its finest. Idaho has been treated as a true partner, with a meaningful voice in national policies that most directly impact our citizens.

At other times – and far too often – I have experienced the kind of dysfunction and heavy-handedness from our national government that make a mockery of what the Framers meant by federalism. Idaho has been treated as if we are little more than a box to check rather than a partner with which to collaborate in the interest of the people we serve.

In fact, I’ve seen both interpretations of federalism come into play on a single issue between my six years in this body and my three terms as governor.

The limited and narrow powers granted to the federal government by our Constitution have been expanded exponentially, constantly reaching far beyond those originally enumerated and essentially relegating the Tenth Amendment to the dustbin of American history. That kind of “mission creep” is most apparent in Idaho and throughout the West – wherever the federal government controls access to and use of enormous swaths of our land.

Instead of being recognized as sovereign states with equal standing in our union and essential interests at stake, when it comes to managing our resources we find ourselves continually having to ask our federal landlords, “Mother, may I?” And the problem increasingly extends beyond land management to issues as diverse as immigration and health care.

Nevertheless, hope abounds. I want to express my appreciation to Congress and the current administration for working to restore the standing of states as true partners in governance. After years as an afterthought, how we collaborate and develop our own solutions matters again.

In Idaho, this rebirth of federalism is resulting in development and application of innovative approaches to addressing shared challenges. With the encouragement of President Trump and Congress, and consistent with the role of states as laboratories of democracy, I signed an executive order in January directing my Department of Insurance to seek creative ways of improving access to affordable healthcare coverage in Idaho.

We have seen premiums for Affordable Care Act plans skyrocket in Idaho over the past three years. As a result, individuals and families are forced to make the unacceptable choice of paying for health insurance or paying for groceries. But encouraged by elimination of the individual mandate and this administration's expressed support for greater state flexibility, Idaho now will allow off-exchange state plans that provide essential coverage at more affordable rates.

Despite some overwrought arguments to the contrary, our plans actually will complement the ACA. That's because Idaho is requiring that insurance carriers that choose to offer state-based plans also must provide ACA plans. And most importantly, all ACA and state-based plans will be within a single risk pool, reducing costs across the individual marketplace.

Instead of standing idly by as more and more hard-working Idahoans are priced out or left out of ACA insurance coverage, we decided to tackle the problem head on using a first-of-its-kind approach. And we are confident it will work.

Another good example of our improving relationship with the federal government relates to a program known as Good Neighbor Authority. The 2014 Farm Bill authorized states to lead forest restoration projects on national forest lands. That collaborative, cross-jurisdictional effort is increasing the pace and scale of timber harvest projects in areas prone to insect infestation and disease that can lead to catastrophic wildfires.

Over the next three years, we expect to treat nearly 11,000 acres of Forest Service land using Good Neighbor Authority, harvesting 70 million board feet of timber and bringing in \$14.5 million in revenue. Good Neighbor Authority improves forest health, reduces fire risk, boosts rural economies, and pays for itself. It truly is the gold standard of cooperative federalism.

We are similarly encouraged by the Trump administration's commitment to streamlining inefficient and costly environmental review processes. Decisions too often are being made in anticipation of being sued rather than being based on sound science and local conditions.

And finally, we continue to benefit from the flexibility built into the Every Student Succeeds Act. Idaho now is empowered to be the architects of our own K-12 education programs. The U.S. Department of Education has moved from punitive sanctions to enabling states to define their own strategies for supporting and lifting up under-performing schools. Instead of closing low performing schools or replacing their principals and staff, the Every Student Succeeds Act leaves those decisions up to states working collaboratively with local education agencies.

While this recent renewal of classic federalism is welcome and refreshing, there remains much room for improvement. I highlight these positive examples in the hope that a culture of treating states as partners rather than stakeholders will take root and extend to other facets of our national government. Again, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today and for your continuing service to the United States of America.

## Governor C.L. “Butch” Otter



The people of Idaho re-elected C.L. "Butch" Otter as their Governor for a third time on November 4, 2014. He was first elected Governor of Idaho on November 7, 2006 and re-elected on November 2, 2010. He previously served three terms in Congress representing Idaho's 1st District from 2001 through 2006. Governor Otter is a father of four and grandfather of seven. He is married to the former Lori Easley of Kimberly. They live on their ranch near Star.

Governor Otter was born in Caldwell on May 3, 1942. He graduated from St. Teresa's Academy (now Bishop Kelly High School) in Boise, attended Boise Junior College (now Boise State University), and received a bachelor of arts degree in political science from the College of Idaho in 1967.

He served honorably in the Idaho Army National Guard's 116th Armored Cavalry from 1968 to 1973, and later was awarded honorary doctorates from the University of the Philippines and the College of Idaho in Caldwell.

Governor Otter's 30-year career in business included membership on the Board of Directors of the J.R. Simplot Company. He also served as Director of the Food Products Division, President of Simplot Livestock, and President of Simplot International. He retired in 1993.

When he was elected to Congress, Governor Otter was serving his fourth term as Idaho's Lieutenant Governor. He served in that office longer than anyone in Idaho history. He previously represented the people of Canyon County in the Idaho House of Representatives for two terms from 1973 to 1976, was on the Idaho Republican Party Central Committee and was chairman of the Canyon County Republican Party.

Governor Otter is a member of the Roman Catholic Church, the National Rifle Association, the Maple Grove State Grange, the Idaho Cowboys Association, and the Idaho 4-H Million Dollar Club. He is a Grand Slam member of Ducks Unlimited, a lifetime member of Safari Club International, was elected to the National Cowboy Hall of Fame Board of Directors in Oklahoma City in 1991, and is a lifetime member of American Legion Post 113 in Meridian.