

Idaho State Senator District 5

*** Click on each candidate's name to see their completed questionnaire ***

	Carl Bjerke	Adam Chapman	Cheri Zao
<p>1. What is your name, what office are you running for and why are you running for this position?</p>	<p>I am Carl Bjerke, incumbent Senator for legislative district 5, and I am running for re-election for my seat. I am running to continue serving my constituency in district 5 and the great State of Idaho. I have just completed my freshman session and I am looking forward to the opportunity to continue advancing the good work accomplished in the 67th legislative session, into the 68th.</p>	<p>Running Unopposed</p>	<p>I am Cheri Zao and am running for Idaho State Senator, Legislative District 5. I am running because I believe in the American Dream. We all deserve the right to personal freedom and the opportunity to attain a better life. Currently this is very difficult for our kids and local workers and I want to legislatively make changes that need to be done to make this a reality once again.</p>
<p>2. When do you believe life begins and how does this belief affect the legislation you will support?</p>	<p>I believe life begins at conception, and this belief is the cornerstone of and the basis for the votes I make and the stances I take regarding the sanctity of life.</p>	<p>Running Unopposed</p>	<p>This question is complex and does not have a simple answer. I must point out my background. I am a retired Family Medicine Physician and a College Professor of Anatomy and Physiology. I have studied and witnessed all of the stages of human development and must tell you life is more than DNA inside a cell. A human life is a series of successful completion of challenges. I will start at the beginning where the egg is released from the ovary and must first make it into the uterine tube. The sperm must travel successfully through hostile terrain to make it to the proper location for fertilization, the uterine tube. The sperm itself has to undergo physical and chemical changes before it is even able to fertilize the egg. If successful fertilization takes place the zygote must then travel down the uterine tube and implant successfully in the proper location of the properly prepped uterine lining. Fifty percent of fertilized eggs fail these first few hurdles and are lost. If the fertilized egg implants properly the lining has to remain capable to feeding the hollow ball of developing cells until it creates its own placenta. Ten to fifteen percent fail this part of development and are spontaneously lost. The ones that make it to 8 weeks are now fetuses and look like aliens because body parts have yet to migrate to their proper positions which generally happens at or around 16 weeks. It isn't until 16 weeks that we can identify major anomalies that are not compatible with life outside the womb. If a developing fetus is found, through testing, to be a doomed life-form I do not believe it is anyone's business to tell the pregnant woman and her family how to deal with this devastating event.</p>

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<p>3. What are the top three issues that you feel the legislature needs to address?</p>	<p>This question represents a moving target as the attempts to subvert the founding principles of this constitutional republic form of government are constantly shifting as well. Based on my experience while serving in this past session, I believe the most global concerns to continue addressing are reflected as such:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Legislature will need to continue addressing the multifaceted Marxist driven attempts to fundamentally transform our nation, everything from DEI, CRT and SEL indoctrination in our public schools to the constant attempts at creating gender confusion, the efforts at destroying the family and removing God from our public spaces. • The national debt and the effect it will ultimately have on our state budget. We rely heavily on the federal government, to the tune of 40% of our current budget. • Continuing to be vigilant on protecting our God given rights, i.e., 1st and 2nd amendments, which are number 1 and 2 for a very good reason – if we don't protect these rights, we lose the battle for retaining all others. 	<p>Running Unopposed</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Housing – 22% of residential properties sold in Idaho in 2022 were purchased by hedge fund and private equity companies. This takes much needed affordable housing off the market. This harms healthy communities and we can do better to ensure our kids and workers can afford to live within our communities. 2. Taxes – are necessary for infrastructure but we can increase our grocery tax credits which in turn will help everyone who lives here deal with inflationary pressures. 3. Bonds and levies – they need to be restructured so that all communities are treated more equitably. 4. Childcare – we want young families that can afford to work and live here. Many families need 2 incomes to survive. We need to create better childcare opportunities for those in our communities.
<p>4. What do you consider the biggest health care issue for Idaho, and where do you stand on it?</p>	<p>Based on my experience from this past session, our biggest health care issue facing Idaho will be the effect of health care rationing, not only due to the growing influence of a single payer system, but also because we are 50th (dead last) per capita, doctors and allied medical providers to population. If we don't address this inequity and our failing Emergency Medical System (EMS), we will be underserving our aging baby boomer population, in particular, but also everyone else. My stance is in support of efforts to provide a public medical school and increasing the number of residency opportunities.</p>	<p>Running Unopposed</p>	<p>Biggest healthcare issue for Idaho: Recruiting and retaining medical providers. Our environment has become too hostile toward our medical providers. Job satisfaction and happiness is worth more than money. Culture plays a large role. Too many people have taken their disappointment and frustrations regarding COVID out on healthcare providers. Our legislators and communities have become more adversarial toward our healthcare providers, educators and librarians. This is not an environment most professionals want for their families so they go elsewhere. We must refrain from creating adversarial relationships with our professionals because we have already lost so many.</p>

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<p>5. Idaho’s school system has room for improvement, how would you legislate to improve K-12 education in Idaho?</p>	<p>There is a simple solution that I have supported, in different fashions, in each half of the 67th legislative session, which is to provide a vehicle for school choice. Opponents of school choice will often state that we have school choice / education freedom through the charter school system, but this is just another form of public school. The needed choice will be appropriately reflected in support for home school, micro schools, etc. Believe it or not, some of our highest performing schools are the charter schools, which created part of the current contrast indicating some of the failures of the traditional public education system, here in Idaho; rising tides raise all boats and competition is necessary to maintain sharpness in this industry.</p>	<p>Running Unopposed</p>	<p>Idaho’s schools have been underfunded for a while. Our legislators have not addressed this issue properly. Due to lack of action by the legislature, a citizen’s school funding initiative was then put into play. It passed the signature gathering phase but was withdrawn from the voter approval process when Governor Little agreed to address the issue. It was hard to watch our legislature starve our school and then blame them for not doing their job. Legislatively, I believe we should rewrite the funding formulas for our school bonds and levies.</p>
<p>6. Do you support or oppose legislation to prohibit gender reassignment treatment/surgery on minors?</p>	<p>I have and will continue to support legislation to prohibit gender reassignment treatment and surgery on minors, as well as voting to take away the opportunity to use any public monies to be utilized for these treatments and therapies for minors and adults alike. I will continue to support these efforts as long as I am serving in the legislature.</p>	<p>Running Unopposed</p>	<p>Legislation should not interfere in our parent child relationships unless there is abuse. Children and teens undergo a lot of emotional development. Their views of themselves and their understanding of the world can change considerably. If a team of medical professionals are working with the child and parents, we should allow medical treatment. However, it is my medical opinion that any surgical treatment should not occur until that individual is 27 years of age or older.</p>
<p>7. If elected, how will you ensure that you are aligned with your North Idaho constituents’ values and how will your voting record reflect those values?</p>	<p>My metrics for voting is, in this order: I pray for wisdom and knowledge before each floor session; I consider the US and Idaho constitutions for guidance, as well as the respective Republican Party platforms. I have someone doing studies of emails and calls received from my district, where I take these requests into account, when making my decisions on voting. The last thing I consider is the other many influences, such as: lobbyists, political action committees, government agencies, etc. I have a voting record, now, so it is available to gauge my metrics for making my votes and how my values and principles align with those of my constituents in N Idaho.</p>	<p>Running Unopposed</p>	<p>When not in session I plan to connect with my constituents at town halls, Chamber events, Rotary Club events, HOA meetings, school board meetings, churches and at various small business group events. When in session I will attend to emails, letters, and phone calls. I have a website: cherizao.com, which will be maintained and updated regularly when we are in session.</p>

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8. What is your definition of marriage?	My definition of marriage is the Biblical definition: A God ordained, covenant relationship between a man and a woman.	Running Unopposed	Marriage is a contractual agreement between two individuals for the financial, social, and emotional benefit of the two individuals and their offspring if they choose to have them. Most religions require the two individuals to be of the opposite sex and this makes sense for procreation purposes. Genesis 1:28 "and God said to them 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth'".
9. In recent years, sexually explicit materials have invaded public schools and libraries. In your opinion are these materials appropriate for minors under 18 years old?	My second half of the 67 th legislative session vote on House Bill 710 is an indication of my views on this matter, where I voted to not have these materials available to minors in our school and public libraries. This is a great win for those who support this cause – the bill went to the Governor on April 4 th .	Running Unopposed	I am more concerned about child neglect and abuse and about how to properly regulate sexually explicit material over the internet. Legislatively, I think we are dividing our community with our current punitive methods which are directed at library personnel. It doesn't make sense to me because we elect our library board members and they are the ones responsible for broadly overseeing the mission of the library and directing the head librarian. Why are we punishing the personnel of the library and why is the board exempt? I look forward to my constituents helping me better understand their concerns and goals.
10. What legislation should be passed regarding School Choice?	There are several potential iterations in dealing with the school choice issue, but I lead towards having a tax break / credit provided for those wishing to educate their children outside of the traditional public school system.	Running Unopposed	Once we fund all schools equitably there will be less inequality and less issues with school choice.
11. Migration from other states has caused property taxes for current homeowners to substantially increase. What legislation would you recommend to prevent property tax increases that are causing a financial burden and forcing some owners out of their homes?	This issue should not necessarily be isolated as the most direct cause and effect reason for increased property taxes, as it is more complicated. The cycles of boom and bust and effects of migration are both temporary phenomena, albeit part of the equation. So, the solutions should address more lasting strategies that will allow for adjustments to the market, without driving people from their homes. There has and continues to be efforts made, whether it is the circuit breaker or the last two decreases in income tax, as an associative relief to rising property taxes, but I feel more structural changes to the levy system could have a greater positive effect. But, and generally speaking, setting a limit on the taxable value of the home, on a sliding scale, could take away the burden of taxes for most homeowners, or at least buffer the effects of large swings in taxes related to value.	Running Unopposed	Home property values have gone up remarkably these last few years. Because Idaho uses a levy based system instead of a rate based system our property taxes do not skyrocket. However, that doesn't mean our lower income homeowners do not feel the financial strain. Fortunately a wonderful program is already in place that can significantly reduce their property tax burden. It is called the Circuit Breaker program. Recently I witnessed an elderly homeowner cut her property tax burden down from \$1500 to \$51. It is a great program and I believe it could undergo some expansion and include a longevity factor.

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12. In your opinion, if elected, who do you see yourself accountable to and why?	First and foremost, I see myself accountable to God, as it is to His divine providence that I have been afforded this opportunity to serve. If I am setting out to align my service and my votes to His will, I will also be accountable to those who elected me. I am not serving in this capacity for myself – this is not a self-serving venture. I am accountable to my constituents and the great State of Idaho to leave this place better than how I found it.	Running Unopposed	I am accountable to my constituents and conscience. It is my job to do the best for all in my community, not just the ones that voted me into office.
13. In recent years some groups have advocated for legalizing marijuana in our state, do you support or oppose the legalization of marijuana? Why or why not?	We are set apart in the best of ways for continuing to take a stance against the legalization of marijuana – I oppose any legislation that would change this. I believe very strongly that the legalization would be an immediate slippery slope to a greater degradation here in Idaho, putting us on bad par with states close to us who have already witness the error of their ways.	Running Unopposed	Regarding marijuana, I don't have an opinion one way or the other. I will have to go with what our community wants. Legalization provides us a revenue stream and control over regulations. Currently states without legalization and regulation actually have more kids using THC products that those states who have legalized marijuana.
14. What is your background and why do you feel it qualifies you for this position?	I am the current LD5 Senator, and my qualifications will be weighed by my constituents and their wiliness to put me back into office. But, in general, I have had a long careen in the medical and public safety arena and have spent most of my later years in personnel and organizational management. My background has given me a unique perspective that not only sees problems but provides for solutions.	Running Unopposed	I hail from Alaska and come from a family of homesteaders. I was taught from an early age to be self reliant and hard working. I have lived in Kootenai county for 35 years. My background is broad with careers in medicine and higher education. I have volunteered on various boards and commissions. Working with community members on Medicare (SHIBA) and simple taxation issues (AARP TaxAide) provides additional insight into community needs. I care about healthy outcomes and find fulfillment in serving the people of my community. I believe I can make a difference. So that is why I am stepping up and asking others to believe in me and my commitment to our community.