

Bonner County Commissioner District 1

	Fred Arn	Steve Smith
1. What is your name, what office are you running for and why are you running for this position?	No Response Received	My name is Steve Smith and I am the endorsed Republican candidate for Bonner County Commissioner, District 1. I am running for that position for three main reasons: (1) I have resided and worked in Bonner County for more than 47 years and serving as a county commissioner is a way that I could give back to my community. Several members of my family presently live in Bonner County and I am invested in making Bonner County the best place to live for all families in the community, including mine. (2) I firmly believe that, with my "legal eyes on" the county, we can do better by avoiding the missteps of the past. (3) After practicing law in Bonner County during the last 47 years, I have developed and refined a skill set in the executive, legislative and quasi-judicial areas in which a county commissioner serves, so I believe that I can add value to my community.
2. What is your opinion of eminent domain? Under what circumstances do you believe it should be used?	No Response Received	I believe that one of the most-important functions of government is to protect private property rights. As Founding Father John Adams said, "[p]roperty must be secured or liberty cannot exist." Eminent domain is a legal doctrine that I believe should only be used as a last resort in the rare instance in which there is no other reasonable way for an important public project to be completed (such as the location of a safer or necessary public road). The doctrine is, however, authorized in the Fifth Amendment to the U. S. Constitution; Article 1, Section 14 of the Idaho Constitution; Idaho Code Title 7, Chapter 7; and, several sections of the Bonner County Revised Code. I also believe that the Idaho Legislature was right in enacting important property safeguards in the Idaho Regulatory Takings Act, Title 67, Chapter 80, Idaho Code, and that lawful use of the doctrine requires due process and just compensation.
3. If faced with a budget deficit, would you support cutting spending or increasing taxes? What would be your reasons for this decision?	No Response Received	My first action would be to determine the cause of the budget deficit. My second action would be to determine if there would be a need to review the effect of the budget deficit on county citizens. If there were a potential for an adverse effect on essential services, then next I would review line items in the budget to determine if funds could be moved from nonessential to essential services. My third action would be to support cutting spending instead of increasing taxes. My reasons for doing so would include: (1) The Bible teaches us to avoid debt ("Owe no man any thing, but to love one another" Romans 13:8). (2) I concur with Thomas Jefferson who wrote, "I, however, place economy among the first and most important virtues, and public debt as the greatest of dangers to be feared. To preserve our independence, we must not let our rulers load us with perpetual debt." (3) One of the most important duties of government is to make every tax dollar count.
4. Do you support or oppose forced annexation? Why or why not?	No Response Received	I oppose forced annexation ("FA") for several reasons, including: (1) The Third, Fourth, and parts of the Fifth Amendments to the U. S. Constitution provide protection for a citizen's private property rights. The source of those protections is the common law which incorporates the dominion mandate found in Genesis 1:26-28. FA violates those rights. (2) FA by a governmental body is unilateral so the process (a) does not allow property owners any way to vote or have input, resulting in taxation without representation, and (b) subjects property owners to unexpected governmental control of land use. (3) FA causes financial hardship to newly-annexed property owners by obligating them to preexisting debts of the governmental entity which the property owners never had the opportunity to approve. (4) FA is often discriminatory because governmental entities often seek to annex high-value commercial and residential properties as a means of achieving the highest increase in the tax base.
5. Our county is growing very rapidly, where do you see we need to improve infrastructure and what are your plans to improve it?	No Response Received	Because Bonner County is predominantly rural, my focus is on improving rural governmental infrastructure. Those improvements would include what I understand to be the governmental priority areas of rebuilding and modernizing of bridges and roads, as well as protecting and improving water resources. My plan would be to seek and obtain input and ideas from both county departments with expertise in those areas as well as from citizens about needed improvements in those areas. Plans to improve governmental infrastructure would have to be balanced with considerations of the need, cost, benefits, and collateral impacts of such plans. Improvements would also need to be prioritized based upon those considerations. I would leave it to free enterprise in the private sector to improve and modernize non-governmental infrastructure, such as water and wastewater systems, power generation systems, and rural broadband services.

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6. What is your opinion of red-light cameras and license plate readers? Should they be used by the County?	No Response Received	I oppose red-light cameras for reasons including: (1) Automated traffic citations (a) violate the due process rights in the Fifth Amendment and the right to confront an accuser in the Sixth Amendment, (b) violate usual evidentiary requirements by citing the owner, rather than the driver, of the vehicle, and (c) violate Idaho's 2025 Senate Bill 1180. (2) That type of automated camera would have the potential of exposing Bonner County to incur the cost and staff time of class-action lawsuits. (3) Use of such devices is arguably a revenue trap instead of a legitimate safety measure. I also oppose license plate readers for reasons including: (1) The devices gather data on every vehicle regardless whether the vehicle is committing any infraction. (2) The data gathered can be uploaded and stored in nation-wide computer networks not subject to appropriate oversight. (3) Without appropriate oversight, stored data could be subject to inappropriate access and misuse. (4) Device errors.
7. Do you support or oppose Urban Renewal Districts? Why or why not?	No Response Received	I oppose Urban Renewal Districts for reasons including: (1) Tax increment financing freezes property values at the level when the district is formed so that any future increase in property values, with their resulting property tax increases, are paid to the district for whatever is the district's preferred project. As a result, all other property taxpayers have to pay to make up for the frozen property values, especially when the renewal project requires more infrastructure and essential government services. (2) Instead of curing urban blight, the best-financial-case scenario for the district is often replacing bare ground or farmland with an expensive commercial structure. (3) The real property taxes charged as a result of such districts present a financial hardship, especially for property owners on fixed incomes who have already paid off their mortgages. (4) Such districts can be misused to redirect property taxes to a governmental entity's favored projects or developers.
8. Do you support or oppose requirements for developers to pay for community infrastructure?	No Response Received	I support reasonable requirements for developers paying for community infrastructure made necessary by a developer's project. I agree with the purpose statement of Idaho Code § 67-8202: "The legislature finds that an equitable program for planning and financing public facilities needed to serve new growth and development is necessary in order to promote and accommodate orderly growth and development and to protect the public health, safety, and general welfare of the citizens of the state of Idaho." As I understand it, Bonner County so far has only provided for fire district impact fees (Bonner County Revised Code, Title 15), and I support such impact fees.
9. In your opinion, if elected, who do you see yourself accountable to and why?	No Response Received	First, I recognize that I will be accountable to God, which gives me a healthy fear of the Lord (Romans 14:12). Secondly, I recognize that I will be accountable to my wife, who has been willing to be my helper and companion in this campaign endeavor (Genesis 2:18; 23-24). Thirdly, I recognize that I will be accountable to the citizens of Bonner County as their representative. The oath of office in Idaho Code Section 59-401 requires that a newly-elected county commissioner will support the Constitution of the State of Idaho, and that he will faithfully discharge the duties of county commissioner to the best of his ability. Finally, I recognize that I will be accountable to pray for my fellow county commissioners (1 Timothy 2:1-2).
10. 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?	No Response Received	I strongly oppose legalization of marijuana for reasons including: (1) The Bible, in Titus 2:12, wisely teaches that, "... denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world." (2) The Idaho Constitution, in Article , Section 24, states that "(t)he first concern of all good government is the virtue and sobriety of the people, and the purity of the home. The legislature should further all wise and well directed efforts for the promotion of temperance and morality." (3) The 2026 Idaho Voter Pamphlet states the following about Idaho HJR 4, which is the legislatively referred constitutional amendment that would grant to the legislature exclusive authority over, inter alia, marijuana: "Drugs destroy lives, tear apart families, and threaten the safety of our communities."

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11. County Commissioners have an enormous responsibility with the many departments that run our county. Which departments in your opinion should receive priority for increased budgets?	No Response Received	First, the salaries and employee benefits of all employees should be reviewed to make sure that they are adequate and competitive with other local governmental entities ("... the laborer is worthy of his hire." Luke 10:7). The county should seek to retain good employees in every department, and a worthy wage is important to retention.. Secondly, departments that provide essential services for the health and safety of county citizens should receive priority for increased budgets. Those departments would include 9-1-1, Courthouse Security, Emergency Management, Prosecutor, Road and Bridge Department, and Sheriff. With regard to the Sheriff's budget, past spending patterns warrant a high level of scrutiny and the building in of spending safeguards for the future. With regard to employee benefits, I have identified and am researching a promising alternative to the ever-increasing cost of health insurance, which threatens to become unaffordable for the county in the foreseeable future.
12. What should the county's policy be regarding federal funding of county projects?	No Response Received	I agree with the following planks of the Idaho GOP 2026 Platform: Article 1, "Section 1. Fiscal Responsibility. A. The Idaho Republican Party recognizes that all government is financed by taxing its citizens. We believe the size and cost of government, as well as the national debt, must be reduced... D. We believe the growth of government is unnecessary and has a negative impact on both the conduct of business and our individual lives. We endorse the review of all government programs and encourage their assumption by private enterprise where appropriate and workable." The county's policy regarding federal funding of county projects should include limiting such funding as much as is reasonably possible to address the national debt, move in the direction of state and local funding to avoid federal mandates attached to grants, and focus on projects that have national significance, such as the Sandpoint and Priest River Airports (which would be akin to turning an aircraft carrier.)
13. What is your opinion on restricting public comment at county meetings? Why do you hold this opinion?	No Response Received	I believe that public comment should be allowed at county meetings so that commissioners can receive helpful input and information about constituents' concerns and ideas. Such public comment encourages citizens to participate in their government and is consistent with (1) the Preamble to the Idaho Constitution ("We, the people of the state of Idaho, grateful to Almighty God for our freedom, to secure its blessings and promote our common welfare do establish this Constitution."), and (2) the purpose of the Idaho Open Meetings Law, Title 74, Chapter 2, Idaho Code. to foster formation of public policy at open meetings. I also believe that reasonable limitations are necessary on public comment so that county meetings can proceed with decorum ("Let all things be done decently and in order." 1 Corinthians 14:40.). Two reasonable limitations are (1) limiting a commenter's speaking time to a reasonable amount (such as 3 minutes), and (2) limiting the comments to the topic being discussed.
14. What is your background and why do you feel it qualifies you for this position?	No Response Received	Born and raised in Coeur d'Alene. Graduated from the University of Idaho in 1974, and from its College of Law in 1977. Served as the law clerk to the District Judges of the First Judicial District. Practiced law in Sandpoint for more than 47 years, with the last about 24 of those years as a small business owner. As a part of that practice, volunteered and provided free legal services to local nonprofits like IdaHope Families and Bonner Gospel Mission, and also provided legal counsel for numerous governments and public entities--thus saving the taxpayers from having to pay for the defense of frivolous lawsuits. Currently a Constitution Coach with Patriot Academy and serving as the Sagle Precinct Committeeman for the Bonner County Republican Central Committee. Wrote a church security bill that became law. Married, homeschooled 5 children now married. All of the above has prepared me with the executive, legislative and quasi-judicial skill set for serving as a county commissioner.