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## New Idaho political leaders take office

*Otter picks pal and business associate Sen. Brad Little as lieutenant governor*

Gov. Butch Otter was doing more than making an obvious choice in picking Brad Little as lieutenant governor Tuesday. He picked a man he'd like as a successor. Little and Otter have done business with one another, branded cattle side by side on Little's ranch, shared a campfire and hunted pheasants. Their friendship is long and rich.

"Brad and I share some of the same basic values," Otter said in a quiet moment after swearing in Little. "That's personal responsibility, that's family, that's loyalty, that's honesty, that's watching your back, that's being honest even when it's not comfortable to be honest."

Little placed his hand on the same Bible that Otter used the 10 times he has taken the oath of office. It is inscribed with the name of Otter's father, Ben, and now belongs to the governor.

The first time Otter took the oath, he was with Little's father, David, in the Idaho House in 1972. They became friends. Otter came to know Brad Little; his mother, Gerry; and his siblings, Jim and Judy.

"This appointment was easy from that standpoint," Otter said, "but very difficult because of all the other folks that had some great talents to offer."

Otter said he could have been comfortable with many of the 30-some other candidates. But Little is the complete package: competent, smart, likeable, connected and highly regarded by lawmakers of both parties, business leaders and the media.

And what none of the others could match was Little's heritage - attractive to a governor who decorates his office with pictures of cowboys and his own annual trail rides. Little is the grandson of the "sheep king of Idaho," Andy Little, a Scotsman who came to Emmett in 1884 and built an empire with 100,000 sheep.

Otter's father was an electrician, but Otter was fascinated by cowboying. After marrying into the Simplot family, Otter became president of Simplot Livestock. He is an accomplished roper and rider and a former board member at the National Cowboy Hall of Fame.

Former Secretary of State Pete Cenarrusa, a sheepman himself, knew both Andy and David Little. He was not surprised by Otter's pick. After 50 years in state office, the 91-year-old Cenarrusa knows that above all else, a lieutenant must be loyal to his governor.

"Brad is in tune with Butch," Cenarrusa said. "There's a cultural affinity. Their lives are entwined all through the livestock business."

Little used to run sheep on Otter family land in the Boise Foothills. "I never had to go check a fence," Otter recalled. "I never had to call him and say, 'Where's the check?' We shook hands and that was the deal."

Little's son, David, has just returned to the ranch in Emmett after trying out life as a certified public accountant in Seattle. The arrival of David, married four months ago, helped make his father's rise possible. "We've got a good crew at home, so that changed where I could put a little bit more on my to-do list," Little said.

Little, 54, has been in the state Senate since 2001. He was touted as a candidate for higher office even before then. A former chairman of the Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry, he's a popular figure at the Arid Club, ground central for the business establishment. But until now, ambitions others expressed for Little, including lieutenant governor, governor and Congress, were subject to veto by his wife, Teresa.

On Tuesday, Little looked to his wife as he stepped to the podium, widening his eyes as if to say "Wow!" and "Finally!"

Afterward, a reporter asked Teresa Little if her husband now had her blessing to run for governor when Otter decides he's done, most likely in 2014. "Yes," she said, smiling.

Little then joined the conversation, and the reporter repeated what his wife had just said. "You're doing a lot of work for me," he said. "Thank you."

Teresa Little is also from a venerable ranch family, neighbors of the Littles and owners of 50,000 acres of rangeland. Her father, Phil Soulen, was at Tuesday's event.

Asked to size up his son-in-law, Soulen said, "You want something profound from me?" and put an index finger to his temple. "It's right up here. He's a very intelligent man."

Little is not only popular, but powerful. He's leaving his job as the GOP caucus chairman in the Senate, where he spoke for the party's supermajority. He has influence Otter needs in his effort to raise transportation taxes this year.

"He's always risen to the top," said Otter, adding that he expects Little to take on a portfolio similar to Otter's duties during his record 14 years as lieutenant governor: economic development, trade and the vetting of appointments.

"I was looking for not just a future candidate for some higher office, but I was also looking for a great partner and a person that I thought could handle the responsibilities that I wanted to extend to that office," Otter said.

Otter's confidence in Little is of the sort built around a campfire. "You look into that fire and it just seems like you melt differences away," Otter said. "It also seals with a lot of firmness those values that you share, those ideas that you share, those ambitions and enthusiasms that you share."

Though Otter hasn't announced whether he will seek another term, he's raising money and sounded enthusiastic about running with Little on his ticket in 2010.

And if he wins and retires in 2014, would Otter like Little to succeed him?

"I would not have a problem with that," Otter said.