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FOR YOUR INFORMATION
The Idaho Statesman
Boise, Idaho
Tuesday Feb. 28, 2017
Staff & Wire Report
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Elections chief: Boise developer Ahlquist will run for governor

Secretary of State Lawrence Denney says Boise businessman Tommy Ahlquist has promised to file as a registered candidate for governor.

Ahlquist, a former ER doctor, is CEO of Gardner Co., which built the 8th & Main tower and the recently opened City Center Plaza on Boise's Downtown Grove.

The Republican field already has two announced candidates for the May 2018 primary: former Meridian Sen. Russ Fulcher and sitting Lt. Gov. Brad Little. Ahlquist would be the third, and many political observers expect 1st District Congressman Raul Labrador to be the fourth. Fulcher ran unsuccessfully in 2014 against Gov. Butch Otter, who has said he will not seek a fourth term.

Denney said Monday he received an informal complaint last week alleging that Ahlquist has been campaigning while attending multiple Republican-sponsored events without being a registered candidate. Denney declined to mention who filed the complaint.

The Secretary of State's Office did not investigate the claim to see if it was true. Instead, state officials on Friday contacted Ahlquist's team, which said it planned to register Tuesday and hold a media event Wednesday.

A spokesman for Ahlquist declined comment Monday.

Idaho's campaign laws are detailed about what candidates can and cannot accept when it comes to donations before officially registering with the state, but they are not as clear when it comes to attending Republican events and gaining name recognition, Denney said.

"We don't really have anything in our code that lets us investigate that kind of complaint," Denney said. "An exploratory committee is allowed, but you can't take money without being a registered candidate."

Ahlquist, a Republican, has been weighing a bid for the governor's office for months. He is chief operating officer of Gardner Co., a commercial real estate development company with offices in Boise and Salt Lake City that has built or opened some 1.6 million square feet in the Treasure Valley, including the 18-story Eighth & Main building in Downtown Boise, Idaho's tallest.

The company later took over the nearby U.S. Bank Plaza, erecting a multi-use building on a former parking lot on the site as well as an underground regional transit hub.

Ahlquist, 49, moved into real estate development after an initial career in medicine. A Utah native, he moved to the Treasure Valley in 1999 and was head of the Emergency Department at St. Luke's Meridian

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Medical Center before he and his father connected with Gardner in 2007. He has served as a stake leader for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Meridian and is among the best known business leaders in the area, with a long list of community and business associations and involvements.

Though he has not held public office, Ahlquist's entry could dramatically change the dynamics of the governor's race. Little's campaign had no immediate comment Monday. Labrador could not be reached.

Steve Ackerman, a spokesman for the Fulcher campaign, said a presumptive Ahlquist candidacy, as yet unannounced, was "not a surprise. We welcome the competition."

Ahlquist has attended several Republican Lincoln Day events. GOP officials in almost every county in the state hold their own version of a Lincoln Day, inviting Republican leaders to speak and allowing others to mingle. They are considered influential campaign stops for candidates to gain name recognition, support and donations.

— by Kimberlee Kruesi for *The Associated Press* with assistance from *Statesmen* staff

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