

## **POINTS OF LIGHT: Former teacher lends creativity to America 250 planning**

*Originally published March 7, 2026*

You can take a teacher out of the classroom, but you can't take the classroom out of the teacher. Case in point: Idaho State Treasurer Julie Ellsworth, a former public school teacher.

Her life has gone in different directions since her teaching days. She has been the state treasurer since 2019 and served 12 years as a state representative from Boise. Ellsworth's job includes making sure Idaho maintains a spit-shine credit rating and ensuring that the state receives a healthy return on investments.

There are no rumblings about her job performance. Ellsworth says proudly that her "conservative investment strategy" has returned more than \$566 million in interest-earnings to Idaho taxpayers. And that's just in the current fiscal year.

The "teacher" in her is on full display with the planning of an America 250 Idaho celebration that will culminate on July 4. Her classroom "students" are the hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteers throughout the Gem State who are working to make this the biggest celebration since ... well, maybe ever.

Ellsworth has been spending her "off time" from her official job making Spuddy Buddy dolls to emulate figures from the Revolutionary War era. So, we're seeing the likes of George Washingtater, James Madispud, Spudjamin Franklin and Alexander Hamiltater.

I've seen teachers doing creative things in my time, but none that holds a French fry to this.

America 250 Idaho has more moving parts than the Declaration of Independence. One of my favorites is the 250,000-hour service challenge, where everyday people can document simple acts of kindness. There have been more than 45,000 postings so far, and Idahoans are just getting warmed up.

"This is where Martha Washington comes in," Ellsworth says (yes, teacher). "Martha Washington won the Revolutionary War – she and Abigail Adams (make that Abby-tot Adams). They provided aid and lifted the spirits of the troops."

Ellsworth has tabbed the "Spuddy" version of Martha – or Marth-tot Washingtater – as the mascot for the service challenge.

The challenge has provided hours of interesting reading for Ellsworth. She sees a story about a woman who took her niece for a day to give her ill sister a needed

break. There's one about presenting quilts to veterans from the Eastern Idaho Quilts of Honor. There's one about a Parma woman and her daughter making dinner for a friend who had surgery.

"I'm having some of the best reading of my life," Ellsworth says. "If I want to feel good, I just look at this string of stories. We may have created the template for this, but I'm getting out of the way and letting it happen."

The goal is to collect 250,000 of these stories, but don't be surprised if that number is significantly higher. My friends with the Idaho Community Foundation are "all in" with the project. The foundation sees the opening for encouraging Idahoans to volunteer, shining a light on nonprofits statewide and supporting America250 Idaho community projects through private donations.

"America 250 Idaho is exactly the kind of moment collective giving was designed for," said Steve Burns, president and CEO of ICF. "It brings people together around shared values, and our role is to provide the trusted stewardship that turns generosity into lasting community impact."

Participation in the service challenge is easy. Any act of service qualifies, and folks can post by hopping onto [IdahoKindness.com](http://IdahoKindness.com) or Facebook. Ellsworth offers another solution for those who are not online.

"Write it on a piece of paper and bring it into my office. It will get posted," she says.

It's possible that those papers will be graded, but don't worry because Mrs. Ellsworth is a "nice" teacher. Everybody involved with America 250 gets an "A" in this classroom.

**Chuck Malloy**, an Idaho native and longtime journalist and columnist, is a volunteer writer with the Idaho Community Foundation's Nonprofit Center. He may be reached at [ctmalloy@outlook.com](mailto:ctmalloy@outlook.com).