

# Ask a legislator to explain this

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Published: Tuesday, January 20, 2009 4:09 PM PST

" . . . it shall be the duty of the legislature of Idaho, to establish and maintain a general, uniform and thorough system of public, free common schools." n Article IX, Idaho Constitution

Want to get an Idaho politician to go mum?

Ask why it is some voters must pay school taxes twice to get the same schools as other taxpayers. That gets `em quiet real fast. First they ask what you're talking about then when you explain they will clam up.

The reason they don't say anything is because there is nothing to say. There is no explanation to the fact some Idaho residents pay school taxes twice just so their schools are comparable to what the state pays for in other communities.

Alright, this theme is a bit worn.

We've whined about it here before.

But it is timely.

Patrons of the St. Maries and Kootenai school districts are facing a difficult prospect. The two are among the 60 or so school districts in Idaho that rely on a supplemental levy to operate. For years and years voters in the St. Maries and Kootenai districts have approved the levy.

But this year is different. The economy is in tough shape. Mills have curtailed operations. Those cuts not only impact mill workers but all the loggers, truckers and suppliers who feed the mill. Local schools face a tough job trying to convince people who have lost their jobs to vote to raise their taxes.

And that's what they're going to have to do in May.

Unless, of course, trustees at the St. Maries and Kootenai school districts decide to forgo the additional revenue and start slashing budgets. It would be possible to operate schools in St. Maries and Kootenai without the supplemental levy.

It's just those schools would not be anything like those in other Idaho communities that get enough money from the state to pay for their schools. Communities such as Glens Ferry, Preston, Payette and Fruitland n to name a few.

That may be the most contemptuous aspect of this entire farce.

About half the school districts in the state do not need additional tax money to operate. The other half, including St. Maries and Kootenai, must tap taxpayers twice so their children can get a comparable education. All this despite what the Idaho constitution clearly mandates (see above).

There are two explanations for the disparity.

Only one makes sense.

Some might attempt to argue that the school districts that require supplement levies are inefficient and just do not manage their money well. If this were a recent phenomena, maybe. But the inequity in funding has been with us for more than 20 years n probably closer to 30

years. If we are to believe that poor managers are to blame one would think that eventually those districts would hire a competent superintendent or elect an astute trustee.

But that never happens. The districts that have to tax twice continue to rely on supplemental levies.

The fact some districts receive enough state funding while others do not demonstrates the formula used to disperse funds is inherently unfair.

We've lived with the system for a long, long time. But this year could be a catastrophe. It is not reasonable to expect an unemployed voter to raise taxes to pay for schools - yet the alternative is unacceptable. It is the stuff of a great political debate.

If only we could get the politicians to talk about it.