

News release from the Idaho Democratic House Caucus
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Democrats vote to defeat tax increase

BOISE – Democrats in the Idaho House voted today to defeat a tax increase sought by Gov. Butch Otter.

“While I agree that Idaho's highways and bridges are in need of repair and we have an investment we need to protect, I disagree with the timing for a tax increase on Idahoans,” House Minority Leader John Rusche of Lewiston said after the vote. During floor debate, Rusche said, “We do need to preserve our shared assets, not just the roads and bridges but also our schools and universities.”

“Right now, our economy is stalled and Idaho's unemployment rate is rising,” Rusche added. “More than 51,000 people were without jobs last month, with the unemployment rate reaching double digits in many places. Idaho families and businesses are suffering and now doesn't seem the time to increase their tax burden.”

“On the one hand, Idaho's roads are cash poor ... but on the other hand, many of our constituents are finding themselves cash poor,” Assistant Minority Leader James Ruchti of Pocatello said. But Idahoans understand the need for some cutbacks. “They understand we can't fully fund everything because they are going through the same thing ... so they get it. The question we need to ask is: Do we get it?” Ruchti added that with the state's many needs, “if we're pouring it all into transportation infrastructure, I think we're truly going down the wrong road.”

The tally on HB 246 was 27 for and 43 opposed. All but three Democrats voted against the bill. One who supported it, Rep. Shirley Ringo of Moscow, said that she hoped that the Legislature would invest in “human infrastructure” as well as transportation needs.