

# HIS VIEW: Idaho House is out of touch with reality

By Henry D. Johnston

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Johnston

If you didn't believe it before, you'd have to admit it now: Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter has guts.

In a show of resolve against the radicals in the state Legislature, the governor vetoed 35 budget bills with the promise to veto more until the transportation funding is properly addressed, including an increase in the gas tax.

While I'm not a fan of increasing taxes, I do believe that sometimes increases are necessary. That is why I don't believe the governor is out of line to ask for an additional 6-cents per gallon in gas taxes over the next two years. If such a tax increase were to pass, it would cost the average Idahoan \$3 per month.

Heck, I'd be willing to pay my additional gas taxes a year in advance if it meant I could drive to Lewiston in the winter without feeling like William H. Macy in the opening scene of "Fargo."

The increase is not designed for new construction projects but to maintain the roads we already have. It has become obvious over the last several years that the state has become penny-wise but pound-foolish when it comes to road maintenance.

It's a pretty simple concept, yet it seems to escape the understanding of the Idaho House of Representatives. "No new taxes" is the mantra held by many conservative members of the House. While the concept of operating state government today on the funding mechanisms of yesteryear bodes well as a talking point, it really does not translate well to the real world.

If you study history, you'll find many great ideas have a way of dying on the floor of the Idaho House over reasons that, for no other reason, simply make good talking points.

After many years of tight controls over liquor licenses, a bill was finally put forward this year that would bring Idaho's liquor law into the new millennium. Quite simply, the legislation gave control to local governments by granting them the power to issue liquor licenses on an application basis instead of the population-based system used now.

That bill was killed in the House because some members felt that McDonalds would start "serving Jack and Cokes with Happy Meals" and that loosening up Idaho's liquor law would go against the Legislature's charge of promoting "temperance and morality" among the citizenry.

Finally, the term "local control" always seems to surface with a number of issues taken up by the Legislature. Arguments are made that the state needs to get out of the business of regulating local governments and let local control prevail. Yet the majority leadership in the House continues to block any measure that would allow the current local-option sales tax program to continue past its sunset this fall.

And while I could continue to point out the fallacies of logic that dominates the lower chamber, the fact of the matter remains that the House leadership is keeping this Legislature in session to the tune of \$30,000 per day over a slight increase in taxes that will be long forgotten within a few years.

It is time for the House leadership to grow up and pass a tax increase for the greater good. Maybe by doing so they'll prove that they're not as out of touch with reality as many people think they are.

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