

Take it from Norm: It was a great session

Jim Fisher

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After what some say was a long and rancorous session of their Legislature, Idahoans deserve a little levity. Thankfully, Norm Semanko, chairman of their state Republican Party, is here to provide it.

Almost immediately after legislators adjourned and left Boise for their respective homes Friday, Semanko issued his statement on this year's session. The statement follows, sentence by sentence, with the addition of this page's helpful explanations of what the chairman might say were he not making light of the subject matter.

Once again, the Idaho Republican Party has shown that it is the party of ideas, leading the way.

It is the party of so many ideas, in fact, that most of them contradict each other. Some Republicans support raising the gas tax to finance road repair, and some Republicans don't. Some come to Boise to praise public school teachers, and some come to bury them. Some think restaurateurs should be able to offer you a cocktail before dinner, and some think you've had enough already. Some think Idaho should spend federal stimulus dollars to relieve the effects of a serious economic recession, and some think Idaho should tell Uncle Sam to get lost, as soon as he mails the farm subsidy checks.

I am proud and very appreciative of the hard work that the governor and our legislative leadership in the House and Senate have done under a very difficult set of circumstances.

It would not have been so difficult if Gov. Butch Otter and House Republicans weren't working at cross purposes, of course. House members refused to raise the gas tax. Otter responded by vetoing 30 of their bills. House leaders declared the session over and adjourned, only to be forced back four days later because the Senate wouldn't go along. Sheesh, you show me a more difficult set of circumstances than that.

Like a family discussion around the kitchen table during difficult economic times, our elected Republican leaders had a good, open and honest discussion about the future of our state.

Yes, neither the Bunkers nor the Sopranos ever had such good, open and honest discussions as our elected Republican leaders had this year. Remember when the governor promised to impose performance standards on Transportation Department officials in exchange for more road money, and House Education Chairman Bob Nonini, R-Coeur d'Alene, said the promise was "not worth the piece of paper it was printed on"? How could any family be more open and honest?

Having come to a resolution, we can all move forward together with a common action plan.

If only we all had the same common action plan. But like our ideas, our plans don't jibe. The baling wire and spit holding together that resolution - raiding cash from the state police and the parks to finance a pittance of road work and save the governor a little face - may not last until next year's session, but then, the same disputes are bound to reappear anyway.

What's most important is that I - rather than that Republican-in-name-only whom party members dumped from the chairmanship at their convention last summer - am here to tell you what a close family your Republican Party is, and what a great bargain the \$3.5 million you spent on this year's session was. - J.F.