



Idaho House of Representatives

Democratic Leadership

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2011 End of Session Press Conference Transcript
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REP JOHN RUSCHE

Good morning.

Here we are at the end of another Legislative session. When we started in January, we knew that this year would be challenging and that money would be tight. Those predictions came true. But this session was about much more than tight budgets.

For the last three months, reasonable discourse was discouraged. Independent thinking was punished. Extremism was rewarded. Collaboration and compromise were virtually non-existent. And Republican leadership didn't listen. They didn't listen to us, they didn't listen to dissenting voices in their own party, and they certainly didn't listen to the people of Idaho. This is a Legislature that has run amok, with no accountability to the people of Idaho.

Some have called this session historic. The Civil War was historic, too, but not in a way anyone will recall fondly. We believe that the 2011 Legislature likewise will be remembered and felt for many years to come.

REP. BRIAN CRONIN

The session ended as it began: with Republican leadership punishing its own members for not toeing the party line. In January, a colleague was stripped of leadership responsibilities for having the courage to speak out on ethical matters of consequence. And yesterday, two chairmen who have conducted themselves with integrity and independence were stripped of their responsibilities as punishment for having the courage to occasionally stray from the herd.

Similarly, the Republican Party rammed through a bill that restricts the public's access to primary elections, so that they can insist on ideological purity and complete loyalty to the Republican Party and leave the many Idaho Independents out in the cold. Adding insult to injury, Idaho taxpayers get to pay more than half a million dollars for this electoral travesty.

We are struck by the lack of focus on the major issue for Idahoans and their communities—jobs and Idaho’s high unemployment rate. Very little was done to help communities and businesses put Idahoans back to work.

We tried to dismantle urban renewal agencies and thereby limit economic development. We cut back on support for higher education, a true engine of growth. And through our policy decisions, we guaranteed job loss—likely to be in the thousands—in the education and healthcare industries.

Through our multiple “nullification” efforts, we have likely made it more difficult for Idaho to attract businesses and may even have set up the demise of our domestic health insurers. Bashing the federal government may seem like fun but isn’t a substitute for real policy.

REP. JOHN RUSCHE

The Majority takes pride in pointing out that we’ve balanced budget. That’s not an accomplishment; it’s a constitutional responsibility that every legislature is required to achieve. But look how we did it:

- We turned away \$108 million in Medicaid money that would have gone towards critical health services for the poor, disabled and mentally ill in the name of saving \$35 million in state money.
- We replaced teachers with laptops to be able to cut \$47 million out of public schools.
- We are requiring students in our colleges and universities to continue to face tuition increases of almost 10%, putting the higher education needed for a 21st century job out of reach of many young people. It is tough to “go on” when scholarships and loans are scarce, families are struggling, and there are few jobs to earn the tuition money.

We balanced the budget, not by removing generous special interest breaks and exemptions, not by broad based sharing of the burden, not even through tobacco or other use taxes. We balanced the budget on the backs of our children, our seniors, the disabled, poor and mentally ill. And yet the majority is proud of this budget.

Which brings us to one of the key underlying themes of the session: Power and Accountability. Those with little power were ignored and sometimes scorned and disparaged. Certainly the independent voters had little input into closing the primary elections or paying \$100,000 to the Republican Party for a lawsuit that should have never made it to the courts. In the exercise of absolute power, the Republicans bullied, blustered, and bungled their way through an extremist agenda that suggests they are out of touch with the average Idahoan.

Over the last few months, Democrats have stood up and fought to bring important issues to the table. We will continue to do so. And we will work through the interim to help our communities, our businesses and families in Idaho cope with the havoc this legislative session has wrought.

We also feel it is critically important that we inform Idahoans about all that happened during this historic session—the good, the bad, and the ugly—so that they are prepared to hold their elected officials accountable. Those that were tuning in from home often wondered, “What the heck are they thinking and doing?” We intend to make sure that Idahoans understand what the actions of this Legislature mean for them and their families.

And most importantly, we will continue to listen to Idahoans. Unlike our Republican counterparts, we have heard the public's outcry. We are deeply troubled that the Legislature plows forward with no consideration as to whether the people are behind them.

We encourage the people of Idaho to send us your stories. Let us know how the decisions made in this legislative session are impacting you. And let us know how we can help and serve you.

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