



House of Representatives State of Idaho

MINORITY LEADER

No Idaho parent asked me to come to this Legislature and underfund Idaho's public education system. That, however, is the action endorsed last week by the House of Representatives when the majority party passed a \$126 million tax cut for businesses and the wealthy.

Bills like this one make it hard for me to go home to my constituents and tell them that my peers in the majority party share their values of opportunity and educational success. It is hard for me to offer Idaho families hope that Idaho's elected leaders are prepared to bridge the gap between promises and actions.

After 20 years of this kind of flawed policy, Idaho ranks 50th in family wages, first in percentage of minimum wage jobs and near-last in per student investment.

These poor outcomes are interrelated. These outcomes result from a generation of generous tax cuts to the rich while cutting investment in our children's future. Even businesses that might desire such a tax reduction would be loathe to seek it at the expense of a sound public education system.

Two problems I see with this bill (H 548). First, it does not reflect the wishes of Idahoans. Second, it ignores the evidence of the Majority's past tax policy.

As of now, 94 out of the state's 115 school districts must pass supplement levies simply to keep the lights on. Just 15 years ago, only 41 districts need such levies. In the intervening time, Idaho slashed its ability to raise money for education by cutting taxes for the rich. What happens if there is another \$126 million removed and unavailable?

Local taxpayers took on ever increasing tax burdens. Why? Idaho families never said they wanted to see the opportunities for their children diminish. Twenty years of failed policy has led to many school districts with 4-day school weeks, reduction in extracurriculars and more crowded classrooms.

So, if the Legislature continues to short public schools, the local school districts ask to raise property taxes to keep operating. Are parents and communities going to choose to limit their children's potential? If they have a choice, none will do it. So in elections, the incumbent legislators brag that they are "cutting taxes". And are "fiscal conservatives". They have been playing and, it appears, continue to want to play, "hide the ball" and shift financial responsibility to local property taxes. Is that making education a priority?

So, what of the State Budget committee recommending a 5 percent increase in education spending? That brings us to 2008 investment levels, but fails to note that we have 14,000 more students today! Remember, it was not as if the majority was lavishing wealth on schools before 2008 either.

If education really were a priority—and if we lived in a fantasy world where we really had an extra \$126 million to trim—wouldn't lawmakers invest that in education? Wouldn't lawmakers who valued education have discussed the governor's school task force recommendations as the package of proposals they were intended to be? Wouldn't lawmakers take a sober look at the potential \$350 million price tag to implement those thoughtful recommendations? Wouldn't lawmakers want to deliver a world class education to students as soon as possible?

If education were a priority, they would.

If education were not a priority, they would propose another round of tax cuts.

For more information, contact:

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