

Democratic Lawmakers Make Strides to Protect the Middle Class

BOISE— The 2015 Legislative session marked a momentous shift in investing in education, improving health and safety of Idaho and keeping a focus on the prosperity of middle class workers and families.

The following is the end of session speech delivered by the House and Senate Democratic leaders:

When Idaho Democratic lawmakers stopped a tax hike unfair to the Middle Class this year, we received many words of gratitude from Idahoans. One thank you note read, “Thanks to the Mighty Minority.”

Something powerful happened this year. The voice of Idahoans became stronger and Idaho Democrats listened and took their words to heart.

The People of Idaho communicated with us in a big way. And we value the emails, letters, petitions, rallies, press conferences, phone calls, the tweets, Facebook posts, and the in-depth conversations. As a result, we have been able to move the discussion and the majority party toward improving the lives of Idaho citizens.

As much as Idaho reached out to Democratic lawmakers, we reached out to Idaho. We traveled the state to hear from and share with Idahoans. Not only did we hold town hall meetings in districts that we represent; we met with Idahoans across the state in Sandpoint, Wallace, Idaho Falls, Driggs, Ketchum, Bellevue, Shoshone, Gooding, Wendell, Hagerman, Fairfield, Kuna, Caldwell, Star, and Meridian.

Idaho Democrats share the values and goals of the vast majority of Idahoans. It is their support, input and confidence that serve to sustain our commitment to our constituents.

Some notable accomplishments:

Idahoans said that we must increase our investment in education. And finally, Idaho Republican Lawmakers have Learned - A collaborative approach to crafting quality education legislation requires every party to be at the table working diligently for the future of our children. Idaho Democrats led the charge to ensure a better public educational was attainable in several areas-

- Our schools will see a 7.4 percent budget increase next year. While there is considerable opportunity this is a tremendous step forward.
- Idaho Democrats listened to parents who said we must demonstrate respect for teachers and compensate them appropriately to enable Idaho to compete with other states. Our members worked diligently on a career ladder bill that rewards teachers commensurate with their education, experience and expertise.
- We took immediate action in response to the Idaho Education Network debacle. Greater scrutiny will be given to future contracts and we are reminded that local communities are often best suited to identify and manage their needs. Upon voiding the IEN contract, school districts realized a 37 percent savings in broadband services. The Spokesman Review reported that Post Falls School District alone is saving \$8,000 a month and getting far better service.

This session, Idaho Democrats remained focused on putting dollars in the pockets of average Idahoans and helping them keep them. We stopped a middle class tax hike. We recognized the importance of our recreation industry and seek to expand its influence on Idaho's economy.

We also protected our legacy of hunting, fishing and recreating on public lands.

We stopped an interstate compact to privatize public lands.

We stopped the creation of another costly commission devoted to taking over public lands.

We passed a resolution affirming the value that Idahoans place in public lands and calling for collaboration to solve land management issues.

We are proud of other great victories to make Idaho safer and healthier:

We passed legislation to improve the safety of Idaho's roads and highways to save lives and improve our economy.

We secured support to implement safe routes to schools across Idaho.

We passed a bill to help Idaho schools better handle bullying.

We passed a tele-health bill that improves Idahoans' access to health care.

We kept the costs down for vaccines, improving the health of our children's and saving Idahoans \$6 million a year.

We are pleased to see conversations moving in the right direction and hope to see movement soon on many key ideas:

Through our outreach and consistent efforts legislators are seeing the wisdom of statewide early education programs in Idaho.

After nearly a decade, the Legislature held a public hearing about updating Idaho's Human Rights Act. We are making progress and will continue to push for this important change.

Idaho's workers deserve a raise, we have made progress in advancing the conversation of increasing the minimum wage.

Idaho Democratic lawmakers leave this Legislature energized and optimistic. The work this year has been mighty because it is backed by the people of Idaho. We are proud our accomplishments and we, again, thank the people of Idaho for all you do and giving us the honor of representing you.

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