

GOALS FOR THE 2012 LEGISLATURE

By Wayne Hoffman

People keep asking me, “What do you want for your big 4-0 birthday?” It is just around the corner, Jan. 10, the day after the new legislative session begins.

Being so involved in freedom issues as I am, I’ve invited 105 of my closest friends to come to Boise and talk about public policy for three months.

For a nerd like me, I couldn’t think of a happier way to start a new decade of life. Here are my festive, free-market oriented suggestions for the coming birthday legislative session:

1. Say no to Obamacare. Obamacare goes before the U.S. Supreme Court this summer. The law may yet be struck down. There is no reason for the state to begin creating new government bureaucracies and fees and to enshrine Obamacare into state statute even before the court has had a chance to consider the law.
2. Improve the financial well-being of Idahoans by cutting taxes and regulations. Idahoans should not have to continue to endure confiscatory tax policies and rates that penalize wealth creation and success. If Idaho politicians really want to get the economy rolling again, cutting taxes and removing regulatory burdens is one of the best ways to do it.
3. Continue cutting government. Yes, it is likely money will be available to begin refueling agencies that have done without for several years. But there remains plenty of waste in state government — waste that deserves cutting now more than ever. Money unspent is money that can be used to cut taxes.
4. Reform the state public employee pension system. More than 16 percent of government payroll goes into the state pension system, and it’s still not enough to protect the long-term viability of the program. Indeed, the separate judge’s retirement fund is paying out more than it can afford. And the fact that legislators get to convert their part-time jobs into big pension payouts is a symptom of lawmakers benefiting from an entitlement program of their own creation.
5. Continue education reforms. We made a good start last year with Superintendent Tom Luna’s reforms to the state public education system. More needs to be done, including the elimination of the cap on the number of charter schools and the promotion of school

choice. Indeed, innovations like Rep. Steven Thayne's "8 in 6" plan, which would let students save as much as \$10,000 a year on college, should win legislative support.

6. Continue union reforms. Last year, the Legislature required the education unions to negotiate in public with school boards. The same level of transparency should be required of fire and police unions engaging in negotiations with elected city and county government boards.

7. Put a cap on property taxes. While Idaho limits the growth in property tax budgets, the cap is doing little to suppress the size of local government even in recessionary times. Legislators should impose new caps that really do limit the size and scope of local government.

8. Reform entitlements. I'd like to ditch all of our entitlement programs, like Medicaid, which is an expensive, colossal failure. This may take time. If we really want to help Idahoans, the first step is to understand who is on the system, why and for how long. Then we'll be able to bring private and charitable resources to bear to help our fellow residents the way we used to.

9. Let the free market work. Government should stop trying to run the marketplace, either directly or indirectly. Taxpayer money shouldn't be used to pick winners and losers. Idaho lawmakers instinctively know this is true, yet continually get convinced to participate in market manipulation. If lawmakers truly believe in free markets, they should prove it by letting the market work.

A short legislative session would make a great birthday present. Better: A legislative session that has a singular focus: the advancement of freedom for all Idahoans.