

Just leave the driving to us, you silly voters

Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

For the sake of argument, consider a conversation between an ordinary voter and an Idaho legislator.

Let's call the mythical ordinary Idahoan John Q. Citizen.

And let's say our imaginary lawmaker goes by the name of Rep. Mike Moyle, R-Star.

John Q: Rep. Moyle, I read you want to cut taxes even more.

Moyle: That's right. We've got a little extra money and you deserve it.

John Q: But what if we don't want a tax cut?

Moyle: Not want a tax cut? Says who? Everybody likes tax cuts.

John Q: Not us. Not most Idahoans. Take the latest Idaho Policy Survey just out from Boise State University. Here's some of what it says:

- Our No. 1 priority is public education. The economy and jobs are a distant second. Taxes come in 10th.
- We're worried about our schools. While a plurality of us - 49.6 percent - say our own local schools are excellent or at least good, a solid majority - 59.6 percent - think the quality of our state system overall is fair or poor.

And why shouldn't we? Every time we turn around, we hear how you legislators have cut corners: next to last on per-pupil spending, salaries so low that the state is struggling to hire qualified teachers, mediocre high school graduation rates and a national publication ranking Idaho education near the bottom.

- When it comes to Idaho's \$130 million surplus, it's not even close: 45.9 percent want that extra money invested in schools. Only 24.1 percent think it should go toward tax relief.
- We want to stay the course. On taxes, 65.3 percent believe taxes are about right; 22.6 percent said they're too high and 9.1 percent said taxes are too low.

It's the same story on spending; 45.4 percent say the budget levels should remain the same; 33.8 percent want to spend more money and only 10.6 percent think lawmakers should start cutting.

Moyle: It's only one poll.

John Q: There are others. Remember the Associated Taxpayers of Idaho-commissioned poll in 2015? When it asked people to choose, 58 percent said spend the money on education and workforce training; only 30 percent wanted tax cuts.

Moyle: We've overdone it. We're spending like drunken sailors.

John Q: How many drunken sailors do you know who leave \$1 billion on the night stand? Last week, Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter claimed he had cut taxes \$1 billion during his 10 years in office. When Kimberlee Kruesi of The Associated Press checked it out, she found Otter was correct. Under Otter, sales taxes are \$633 million lower, thanks to a grocery tax credit passed 10 years ago. We're paying \$213.4 million less in individual and corporate income taxes. Throw in sales tax exemptions as well as business tax credits and incentives. That's easily \$1 billion.

Moyle: Idaho is still taxing more than our neighbors and that makes it tough to compete for business opportunities.

John Q: Says who? Not the State Tax Commission. According to its annual tax burden study, Idaho ranks 48th - if you look at taxes paid per person - and 41st if you measure taxes paid relative to income. Either way, Idaho taxes its people less than any of the 11 Western states.

Moyle: Well, if this is what you want, why do you keep voting for tax-cutting Republicans?

John Q: These surveys look at Idahoans overall, not just the handful of overly partisan people who vote in your party's closed primary election.

Moyle: Don't give me that. We just had a huge general election - 710,545 ballots cast; 75.87 percent turnout.

They sent a message, too. There were five marquee legislative districts at play. When the polls closed, voters ousted four Democrats - including House Minority Leader John Rusche of Lewiston and Sen. Dan Schmidt of Moscow.

With a turnout that large, you can't say the will of the people was somehow suppressed.

Face it: You talk one way. And you vote another.

John Q: So what?

Moyle: So, if you're going to be that dumb, you'll just have to trust us.

We know best. - M.T.