



Idaho lawmakers, don't let the Tribune rattle you

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Dear Idaho Legislature:

I just wanted to let you know you're OK with me — not perfect but OK. I know you're used to hearing all kinds of smack talked about you in the Lewiston Tribune. Well, as Chico Marx said of the ship captain's bed, "Eh, that's the bunk."

You probably know that the Tribune thinks Idaho gives too many tax breaks to "the rich" — ooh, we hate the rich, don't we? Of course, in your position you also know that, as with the nation, most of Idaho's taxes are paid by its top earners. Citizens should check those figures at itep.org.

In fact, looking at tax burden as percentage of income at WalletHub.com, Idaho's burden is actually one point below the national average.

Nor is it true that Idaho's property taxes are burdensome — other than the degree to which all taxes are. Idaho also rests in the middle of the property tax bell curve.

Nor does Idaho suck when it comes to education. This complaint is related to the taxation canard above: "Idaho fails to soak the rich and the children suffer."

Of course, most of the information given in support of this claim focuses on spending and teacher salaries, not academic results.

According to nationsreportcard.gov for 2017, Idaho was just above the national average for fourth- and eighth-grade standardized tests and "significantly above" the average for 12th-grade scores.

By the way, it's uniformity of curriculum that's required in the Idaho Constitution, not spending. The concept is that a student in Idaho Falls and a student in Post Falls will be exposed to the same academic core.

And there is no tie to spending and academic performance. Cato Institute research showed that between 1970 and 2010, spending and the number of school employees rose by nearly 200 percent and 100 percent, respectively, while reading, math, and science scores all flat-lined.

A difference that makes no difference is no difference but Debbie Downer Democrats have to have a focus for their campaigns.

Be that as it may, Idaho's teacher salaries do start about \$5,000 below the national average. But over time they gain to just \$3,000 below the overall average. Moreover, their earnings are about \$15,000 more than Idaho's statewide average salary. Even using the Allegretto-Mishel "Teacher

wage penalty” calculations, Idaho is just above average and just a bit better than Utah, Oregon, or Washington.

Yes, swapping the old district revenue sharing scheme for an increased sales tax was not a recession-proof idea and work on correcting the results of the 2008 crash need to continue. But Idaho is not as bad off as pearl-clutching politicking would have voters think.

And then there’s Medicaid expansion. Since the fall election, Marty Trillhaase has at least twice (Nov 18 and Feb 8) expressed his inability to understand how it passed while voters also supported GOP candidates in state elections.

These editorials effectively claim that real concern about citizens’ well-being is solely the property of Democrats.

Historically speaking, both of the major U.S. parties are the heirs of classical liberalism. As such, their ideas of what the people need to thrive are essentially the same. Where they have differed is in how and what gets us there.

When Idaho voters chose Medicaid expansion along with GOP candidates, they said they want expansion but want it realized in a fiscally responsible manner.

That’s how expansion got 9,066 votes while an unopposed GOP candidate got 12,337 in a district with 2,166 Democrats and 11,677 Republicans.

Even Proposition 2’s deceptively bare-bones language (this column is twice as long and more detailed) tasked you legislators with taking into account “any provision of law or federal waiver to the contrary” before acting to “amend its state plan. ...”

Given that requirement, its proviso “No later than 90 days after approval of this act, the department shall submit any necessary state plan amendments to the United States Department of Health and Human Services. ... ” was unrealistic.

So, dear Idaho legislators, don’t let the yammering get you down. Continue to listen to what the people said they want. Stay concerned about the health, education, and welfare of Idahoans — and keep an eye on the bottom line as you do.

(On a personal note, if there really isn’t enough revenue to give all state employees a raise this year please skip me. I’ll get by — not on what the Trib pays, but I’ll get by.)