



## EDITORIAL: Slapped down

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Mar. 12--CHEERS ... to Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire. When Idaho Gov. C.L. (Butch) Otter ridiculed the Evergreen State's refusal to gut every last program in the name of avoiding any and all tax increases, Gregoire slapped him down.

With good cause.

"Legislators in the state of Washington are talking about even bigger tax increases to tackle a budget deficit that figures to be as big as Idaho's entire state budget," Otter bragged in his so-called "love letter" to businesses in Oregon and Washington. Otter contends higher taxes in those states should make Idaho more attractive to them..

Unfortunately for Otter, Gregoire has more than ideology to rely on. She can draw on some facts. Forbes magazine's annual ranking of state business climates, for instance.

"We're now the second-best state in the country and they went from seventh to 11th," she said. "They're going down in the ranking. Regulatory environment, we're ranked fifth, they're ranked 35th. You get my point?"

Otter is more defeatist than leader on this issue. He's refused to consider any alternative to simply balancing the state budget by hacking away at schools,

higher education and social services -- whether there's any meat left on the bones or not.

Meanwhile, Gregoire and the Washington Legislature cut \$5 billion from a \$32 billion government program the last two years. They're ready to raise about \$700 million in sales taxes to avoid deeper cuts to rural schools, college scholarships and health insurance subsidies for the working poor. Nobody likes taxes, but for every new dollar raised, Washington has cut more than \$8.

In short, Gregoire's a governor who -- like Otter's predecessor Dirk Kempthorne in 2003 -- is determined not to dismantle essential services. Otter is passively cutting his way out of this recession.

In the end, where you would rather do business -- in a state where kids are educated, people are healthy and roads are kept up?

JEERS ... to state Sens. Gary Schroeder, R-Moscow, and Lee Heinrich, R-Cascade. They're among the 24 Republican senators who cleared for final passage your right to remain uninsured even if the federal government summons enough courage to reform health care in this country.

More than 222,600 Idahoans, mostly workers, can't afford health care coverage. So they can forget preventive care. If their health fails, it means turning to the emergency room. When that happens, people with health care and Idaho taxpayers get the bill.

But in an election year, compassion and reason are of no consequence. In their zeal to make political points against the Obama administration and the Democratic Congress, Idaho's GOP-dominated Legislature has embraced a bill that would have the state spending money it does not have -- the price is estimated at \$100,000 -- challenging in court any federal mandate that people

be insured.

Congress has passed no bill yet. Any challenge flies in the face of the U.S. Constitution.

"In my opinion, this bill ignores the history and the reality of the supremacy clause and the interstate commerce clause of the U.S. Constitution," said Sen. Joe Stegner, R-Lewiston, one of three GOP legislators to oppose it.

Otter now will decide whether to transform this partisan misadventure into law.

JEERS ... to Bob Dickow of Moscow. President of the American Federation of Teachers local, the [University of Idaho](#) music professor wants his fellow faculty members to take their frustrations out on students.

To compensate for state budget cuts, the UI wants employees to take about \$1.2 million worth of unpaid furloughs. Dickow says that should translate into canceled classes.

"If they're going to cut the salaries, it seems reasonable that it should be done in a way that has some meaning," he said.

Furloughs are insidious because many dedicated public employees simply take less money and continue doing the work. The taxpaying public doesn't feel the effects of budget cuts being imposed in its name.

So you can understand Dickow's motivation, if not his strategy.

Cutting classes would get the public's attention. But students already are being victimized by these budget cuts as well. Fees may rise 12.4 percent at UI next year and other students across Idaho may face double-digit tuition increases. Because of program cuts, they'll be paying more for less.

If there's a way to impress the community and the politicians about the impact of their spending decisions, fine. Deduct the furlough hours from public service assignments or research duties. But serving students is a faculty's core mission. Students should be the last -- not the initial -- casualties.

CHEERS ... to Washington Senate Majority Leader Lisa Brown, D-Spokane. To remedy Washington's imbalanced tax structure, Brown has offered this solution: When lawmakers pass a sales tax increase to balance the budget, couple it with a referendum that allows voters to replace it with an income tax on individuals making more than \$200,000 and couples earning more than \$400,000.

Without an income tax, Washington leans too heavily on sales taxes. In King County, for example, the rate is approaching 10 percent.

Washington needs more money. But relying on sales taxes places too high a burden on poor and working poor families, who pay a disproportionate share of their earnings.

That's why the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy ranks Washington's tax structure the most regressive in the nation.

The institute calculates a Washington resident earning less than \$20,000 will spend 17.3 percent of his earning in taxes. Someone earning \$537,000 or more will pay only 2.9 percent in taxes.

As Brown noted, Washington voters approved an income tax in 1933, only to be thwarted by a state Supreme Court ruling. -- M.T.

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