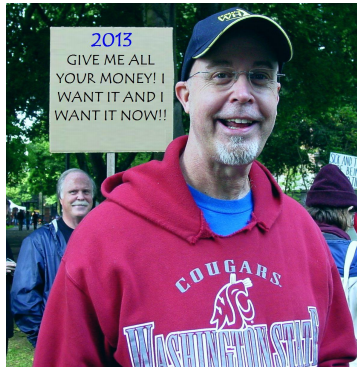


## Moeller calls for state revenue rationality

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By Democratic Rep. Jim Moeller

49th Legislative District



Count a big one for progressives, the liberals with the capital L, the folks who care about the “service” part of public service, who care if public health is funded, if kids get educated, if criminals get locked up or if grandma ages at home.

I admit I was cynical. “Initiative 1033 will pass easily,” I said. “The people will vote their pocketbooks.” Although it passed in Clark County at 55 percent, it failed resoundingly statewide on both sides of the Cascades. Well, slap me and call me silly!

Year after year, grinding voter tax limiting initiatives promoted by the fringe right tied the hands of elected representatives trying to balance demand for service with revenues. All the while our Republican neighbors insisted, “We don’t have a funding problem; we have a spending problem.” What baloney!

Our state government has a funding problem and the people know that. They responded on election day showing Tim Eyman the door on I-1033 along with the rest of the right-wing loonies who still think gay and lesbian people are evil and only want to destroy their marriage and indoctrinate their children. (By the way, although rejected by 55 percent in Clark County as a whole, R-71 was approved by 53 percent in the Fighting 49th.)

Bashing government and its efforts to make a difference in people’s lives by letting the elderly age at home or integrating developmentally disabled kids into mainstream classrooms or expanding basic health care to the working poor and accusing it of “waste, fraud and abuse” had become nearly a sacred creed of Republicans of all stripe.

Certainly, the discussion that will take place with my Democratic colleagues this coming session will be very different than if I-1033 had passed. As we look towards trimming another \$2.5 billion to \$3 billion off an already severely reduced budget the only place to really look for those kind of reductions are health and human services — this means our aged, our children and our disabled.

This means the Basic Health Plan could be gone. This means Public Health severely reduced and community services for our disabled and aged could be gone. All the things we think of as our social safety net will be on the chopping block at the very time when citizens will be looking to their government to help (because they’re the only ones who can) the state budget will be slashed again. That will result in not just a reduction of service this time, but elimination of whole programs.

That means the T word. Taxes. Of course the cry comes up from R and D alike: "How can you even think of raising taxes at a time like this?!" Exactly the same lament I heard when the money was rolling in over the previous six years. There is no good time to raise taxes. Also, not everyone is out of work, and I'm not suggesting we raise taxes on the middle class or business.

I believe there is a better way than what we are doing now in funding state government.

I believe we are too dependent on sales tax as a primary revenue source. Besides being regressive (the poor and middle classes pay 17 percent of their income to sales tax while the wealthy pay 3 percent) so that those who can least afford it pay the most, More-over, the sales tax is too dependent upon economic swings.

I believe both the middle class and business already pay their fair share.

The wealthy have been under-taxed in this state for decades. With no income tax the only tax on wealth is property tax and the sales taxes is just a cost of doing business. This is supported by countless studies and some of the richest men in the world, including Bill Gates Sr. Additionally, Washington is still a great place to do business according to Forbes Magazine, which rates Washington as second in the country as a place that's good for business.

Our better Democratic idea is that government has a legitimate place in the social fabric of our communities to protect the vulnerable and to "promote the general welfare" to be successful. The budget is a problem to be solved, and new revenue (taxes) should be part of the discussion because people need help in this time of crisis.

We will govern. And we will govern with our principles. There are those that say we will lose the majority if we raise taxes. I believe that true leadership never goes out of style. Our principles "humility, honesty and compassion" got us the majority to begin with.

What will new tax proposals look like? I don't know. What I do know and expect is a full and open discussion about all those options beginning now. The defeat of I-1033 and the approval of R-71 show that the citizens of this state get it. I believe that we are all in this together, and together is the only way we will get out of it.