

Locals weigh in on property tax relief

Government: Regional planning board remains focused on transportation funding

By Dan Black - Idaho Press-Tribune

January 25, 2006

BOISE — Treasure Valley government leaders weighed in on Gov. Dirk Kempthorne's property tax relief proposal Monday, potentially foreshadowing the kind of debate awaiting property tax measures in the Legislature.

The issue arose at a meeting of the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho. More commonly known as COMPASS, the group is made up of agencies and elected officials in the Treasure Valley and is primarily concerned with transportation issues.

The COMPASS executive committee and director brought several legislative issues to the board, asking for members' comments.

Director Matt Stoll said the governor has focused on expanding the homeowners' exemption to property taxes and allowing local governments to expand their taxing options.

Boise City Councilman Vern Bisterfeldt said the governor's plan "is a cop-out. It stinks. I don't like to be involved in a farce."

Nampa Mayor Tom Dale said that in the local housing market, people want limits on their property valuations. He said the governor's proposal is effective protection from people's worries. It's "not even a bone, it's a dog biscuit."

Caldwell Mayor Garret Nancolas said he's concerned that his city has few options to provide services with funding sources other than property taxes.

"We don't have another source," he said.

Some COMPASS board members questioned whether the group should comment on the issue, since it's not focused on transportation issues.

A. J. Balukoff, a Boise School District trustee, said that any property tax reform should maintain the stability of government income and that "it's important we weigh in on this."

In the end, the COMPASS members crafted its position as follows:

"The COMPASS Board of Directors supports legislative action that would provide property tax reform to Treasure Valley citizens while ensuring sufficient revenue to fund the transportation infrastructure needs of a rapidly growing state and region."

Other legislative positions taken by the Community Planning Association of Southwest Idaho include the following:

Support for requiring 10 percent ethanol blend.

Support for the state's issuance of GARVEE bonds, which would allow for financing major road projects based on expected flow of federal funds.

Support for laws to expand local funding options, excluding property taxes, to fund public transportation.

Interest to monitor eminent domain legislation to ensure local governments retain the ability to provide "necessary transportation infrastructure."