

A Legacy Worth Preserving



My Grandpa Shumway, a farmer from Preston, Idaho, was one of my childhood heroes. Riding the hay wagon to feed cattle on snowy mornings, watching the milking, and riding in the tractor are among my early memories. Grandpa had a dry wit and a twinkle in his eye. He lived simply, worked hard, and stayed within his means. To his neighbors, his word was as good as gold. To the family his work-calloused hands cared for, he was everything.

One piece of his folk wisdom hangs now on my family room wall: “If your out-go exceeds your income, your up-keep becomes your down-fall.”

When Grandpa Shumway passed away in 2005, Idaho’s state budget was about \$2 billion. During my six years in the Legislature, beginning in 2019, I watched it grow from roughly \$9 billion in 2020 to nearly \$14 billion five years later—an average increase of about 10 percent per year. Even after adjusting for inflation, state spending per person—largely flat from 2005 to 2015—rose 23 percent between 2015 and 2025.

Even a fast-growing state cannot increase per person spending at that rate, cut taxes, and still balance the budget.

MY GRANDPA ALWAYS TAUGHT ME:

*“If your outgo exceeds your income,
then your upkeep becomes your downfall.”*



As a new legislator, I felt powerless to change it. Budget votes were all or nothing with limited information—often treated as signals of support for an agency rather than financial decisions.

That began to change in 2019, when State Representative Wendy Horman pushed for transparency. She made state expenditure records publicly available online and ensured every budget bill included itemized summaries with clear year-over-year comparisons, and disclosure

of any supplemental appropriations—an accounting gimmick that masked real spending increases.

For the first time, legislators could clearly see what they were voting on.

Armed with better information, fiscally conservative legislators began voting “no” on excessive year-over-year increases and on budgets containing supplemental appropriations. Critics claimed that such votes endangered agencies or public safety. They did not. When budgets failed, agencies were not defunded; these budgets were simply revised and returned for another vote.

“NO” votes became what they should have been all along: signals that fiscal restraint matters.

But transparency alone could not fix a system built to expand. The structure of the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee (JFAC) process favored increases. General fund spending jumped 12 percent from 2023 to 2024.

Real reform required changing the way the budget itself is built.

When Representative Horman and Senator Scott Grow became JFAC co-chairs, they began restructuring the process. Their approach mirrors responsible household budgeting.

First come “maintenance” budgets—the government’s equivalent of fixed obligations like a mortgage, insurance, or property taxes. Next come necessary but flexible expenses—groceries or fuel. Last comes new spending—the equivalent of a vacation or a new hobby.

This sequence imposes discipline and clarity. Essentials come first. Extras must compete.

Not everyone welcomed the change. Agencies complained. Some lawmakers tried to undermine the process. Critics argued that maintenance budgets did not include everything an agency might “need”—a revealing objection that showed how routine automatic increases had become.

Even now, as the 2026 legislature has advanced initial maintenance budgets, some act as though anything not yet funded has been permanently cut. In reality, the process is simply working as designed: step by step, priority by priority.

Despite the pressure, Horman and Grow held firm. With support from a majority of Republicans in both chambers, they advanced a straightforward principle: the Legislature’s duty is stewardship of tax-payer dollars—not reflexive protection of government growth.

Transparency is a safeguard. Not a threat.

The results are measurable. General fund spending from 2024 to 2025 increased just 1.7 percent—the most restrained growth Idaho had seen since the Great Recession! That did not happen by accident. It was the product of structural reform and leaders willing to endure criticism in pursuit of long-term fiscal stability.

It is easy to praise fiscal responsibility. It is harder to confront systems that quietly reward expansion. Real reform requires persistence—and the courage to say no.

As Representative Horman concludes her service and joins the Trump administration, she leaves a valuable legacy. Idaho taxpayers have not seen every battle fought to reform our budgeting processes. But they will realize the benefits of transparency and restraint, which will hopefully compound over many years to come.

Those reforms continue under our new JFAC co-chair Representative Josh Tanner and the continued steady leadership of Senator Scott Grow. Together they have placed Idaho on firmer fiscal footing—better prepared not only for today's needs, but for the economic challenges that inevitably lie ahead.

Grandpa Shumway would approve.