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The political pulse

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The school scene . . .

School overrides show initiative is worthless

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If Idaho property owners thought they would save on their property tax by imposing the 1 percent tax initiative three years ago they should be sadly disillusioned by now.

They have found they are paying high taxes and fees, not only on state level, but in the cities, counties and schools. In addition, there are new taxes imposed, such as the 2 percent motel tax, and many others.

In addition, as result of initiative, there has been a cut in many services and programs, such as closure of some state parks and facilities, and reduced fire, police, street, recreation, street, sanitation and sewer services.

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The penalty is pointed up graphically in a chart released by the Associated Taxpayers of Idaho, which, incidentally, took no position and was not exactly a strong backer of the initiative.

This showed that 36 school districts of Idaho—a fourth of the 115—voted override levies to the tune of \$11,256,419. This was \$1,928,868 more than the 39 districts which voted \$9,327,551 in overrides the preceding year.

Showing increasing resistance, patrons passed the levies by a statewide average of only 63 percent, compared with 80 percent in 1980. The ATI report noted public school expenditures represented 22.5 percent of total state and local spending in 1979, ranking Idaho 24th in that category among the 50 states.

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In east Idaho, Idaho Falls School District 91 was the only school to pass an override levy, and that was for \$1,360,000. That was by a 70

percent majority, and \$197,000 more than the \$1,163,000 passed in 1980 by 73 percent.

Last year, two other east Idaho school districts passed school levies, Swan Valley for \$44,000 and Clark County for \$24,000.

The report noted the Idaho Falls override for \$1,630,000, Moscow for \$1,630,172 and Coeur d'Alene for \$1,194,000 represented 37 percent of the amount raised.

Another depressing situation is the drastic differences in the per pupil expenditures. There is a difference of \$3,825 between the highest, Three Creek Elementary 416, at \$5,115, to the lowest, Middleton 134, at \$1,290.

In east Idaho, Idaho Falls 91 ranks 88th of the 115 school districts with \$1,614, Bonneville 93 is near the bottom at 107th with \$1,441, Snake River 52 is 91st with \$1,600, Blackfoot 55 is 74th at \$1,701, Firth 59 ranks 60th at \$1,806, Shelley 60 is near the bottom at 109th with \$1,406, Swan Valley 92 is near the top at 11th with \$2,577, Clark County is also high at 17th with \$2,373, Challis 181 is 41st with \$1,990, Fremont 215 ranks 65th with \$1,775, Jefferson 251 is near the bottom at 105th with \$1,462, Ririe 252 is listed 94th at \$1,546, Salmon 291 ranks 54th at \$1,882, Sugar-Salem 322 is at 83rd with \$1,640, Teton County is 52nd with \$1,891, and Madison is near the bottom at 108th with \$1,429.

If something constructive is to be done in school taxation, leading educators agree an extensive reform is long overdue. This means consolidation, such as cutting the school districts from 115 to 40 or less, equalizing the per pupil expenditures among the districts, change in the school distribution formula, and perhaps other surgery.