

BEYOND “TAXPAYER”

BUILDING PUBLIC WILL FOR REVENUE

By the Topos Partnership
January 2016

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

To understand the deep-seated cultural values, perceptions and assumptions that influence public debates about budgets, taxes, funding for public systems and services, with the goal of creating a more constructive conversation about revenue.



WE HAVE TO LIVE WITHIN OUR MEANS

FRAME CONSEQUENCES



- Cut state budgets
- Avoid deficits
- State employees have to cut back too
- Money doesn't increase much



NATIONAL PROJECT FEDERAL LAYER, 4 STATES (WA, WI, KY, CO)

PHASE 1: CULTURE MAPPING

- Advisory groups
- Elicitations
- Ethnography (WA and WI)
- Media review
- National survey

PHASE 2: CHANGING THE CONVERSATION

- Talkback testing
- Virtual Community forums
- Baseline surveys



HIGHLIGHTS

**DEFAULT PICTURE 1:
MONEY THAT LEAVES YOUR POCKET**

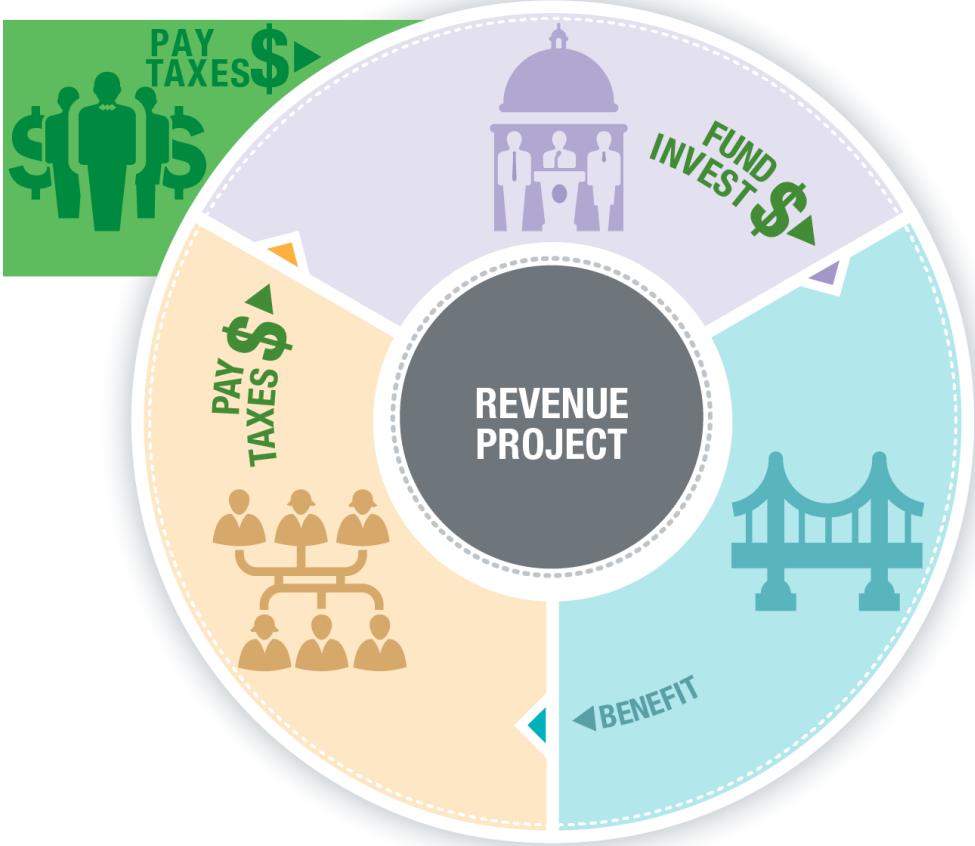


WHAT'S PUSHED OUT : RESPONSIBLE MANAGEMENT

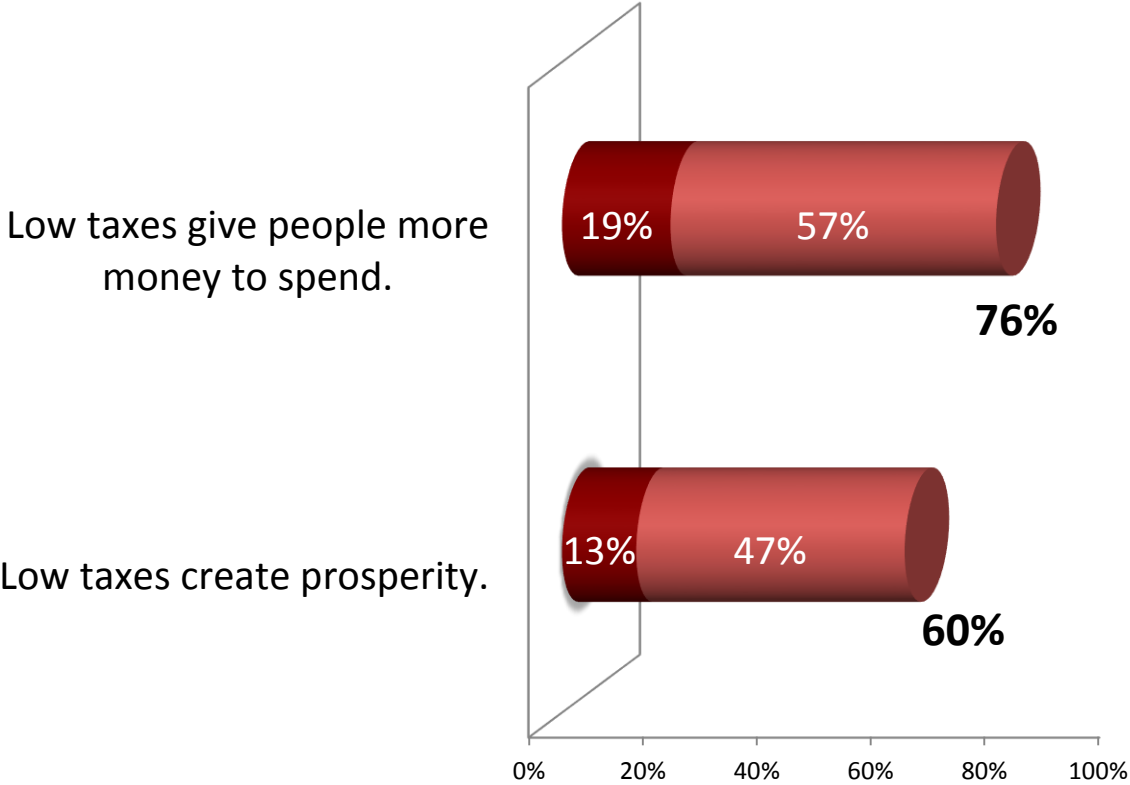




WHAT'S PUSHED OUT : "FOUNDATIONAL SYSTEMS"



PEOPLE KNOW TAXES ARE NECESSARY, BUT BELIEVE LOW TAXES LEAD TO PROSPERITY



CURRENT COMMON SENSE

- Prosperity – more to spend
- Business friendly
- Self reliance
- Smart, frugal

DEFAULT PICTURE 2: REDISTRIBUTION



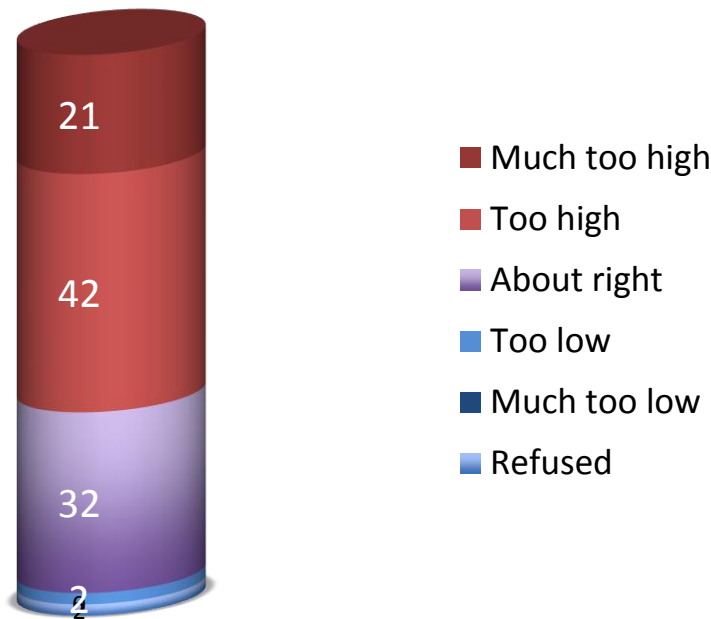
DEFAULT PICTURE 3: MISPLACED PRIORITIES



**STRATEGIC PIVOT #1:
MAKE FOUNDATIONAL
SYSTEMS MORE
VISIBLE**

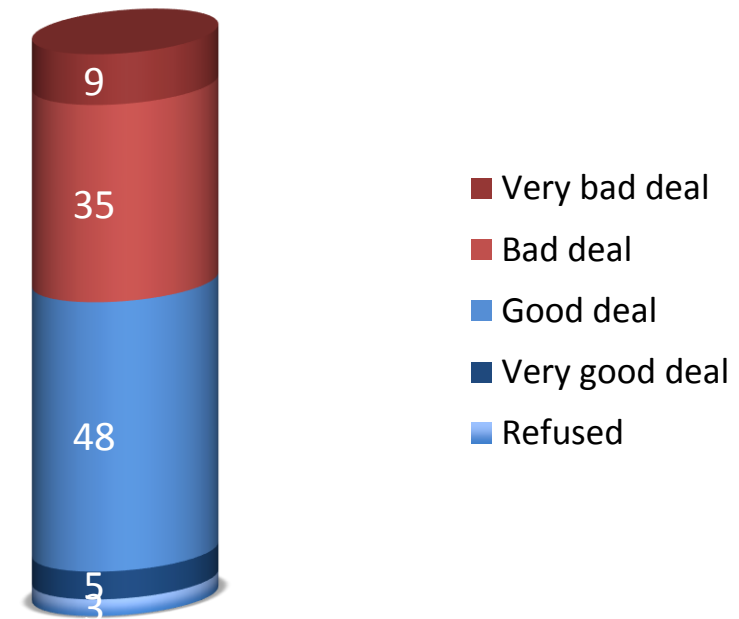
CONNECTING TAXES TO SOCIETY/QUALITY OF LIFE, HELPS

Thinking about all the taxes you pay at the federal, state and local levels, do you consider the amount of taxes you pay as:



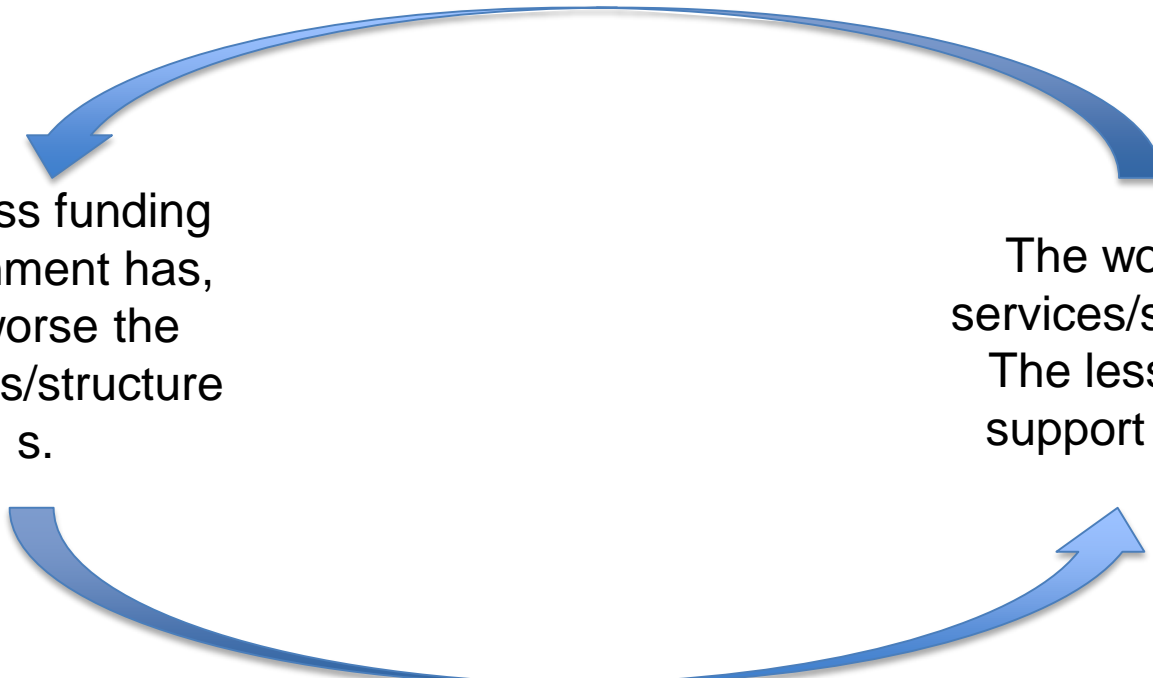
Consider for a moment all the things government does including: (examples), and other things that support civilized society and our quality of life.

With this in mind, when it comes to the taxes you pay, do you feel like you personally are getting a:



SATISFACTION AND TAX ATTITUDES RELATED

FAILING STRUCTURES/SERVICES MEAN TAXES ARE WASTED

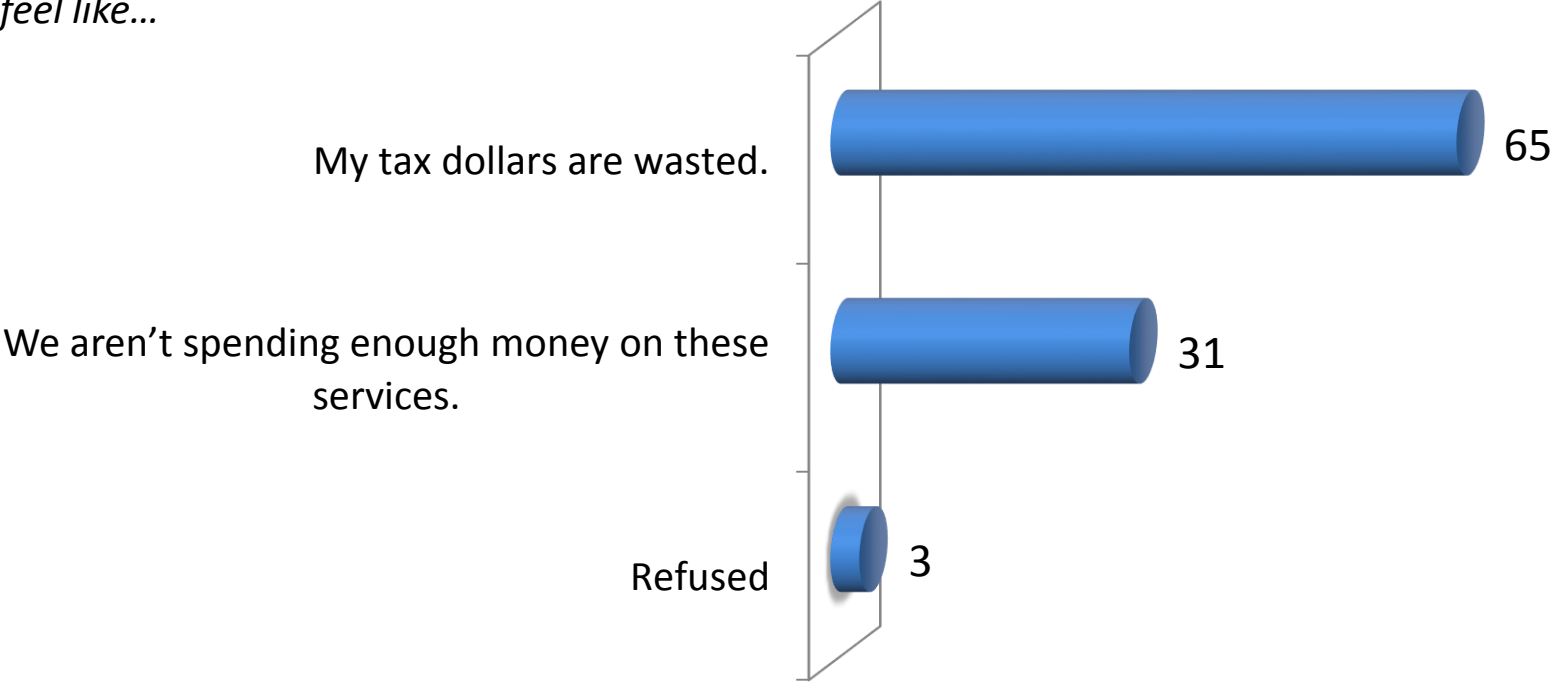


The less funding
government has,
the worse the
services/structure
s.

The worse the
services/structures,
The less people
support funding.

COMPLAINING ABOUT BROKEN SYSTEMS UNDERMINES FUNDING SUPPORT

When I see problems in government services, such as roads and bridges that haven't been maintained or schools that are doing a poor job educating our kids, it makes me feel like...



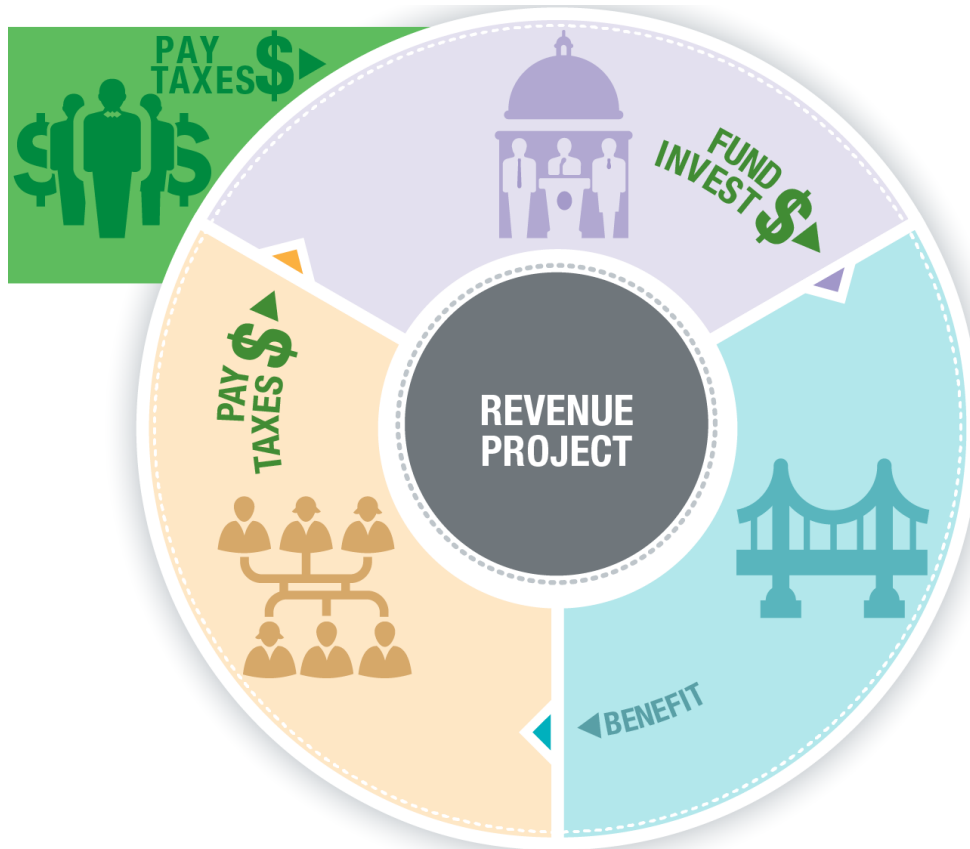
SHIFT FROM “NEEDS” TO “COLLECTIVE BENEFITS/ACHIEVEMENTS”

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Schools have been on a starvation diet for too long. We need more funding for. . .

BETTER START

Our quality of life depends a lot on state revenue. If we want thriving communities, we need the revenue to pay for things like great schools. . .

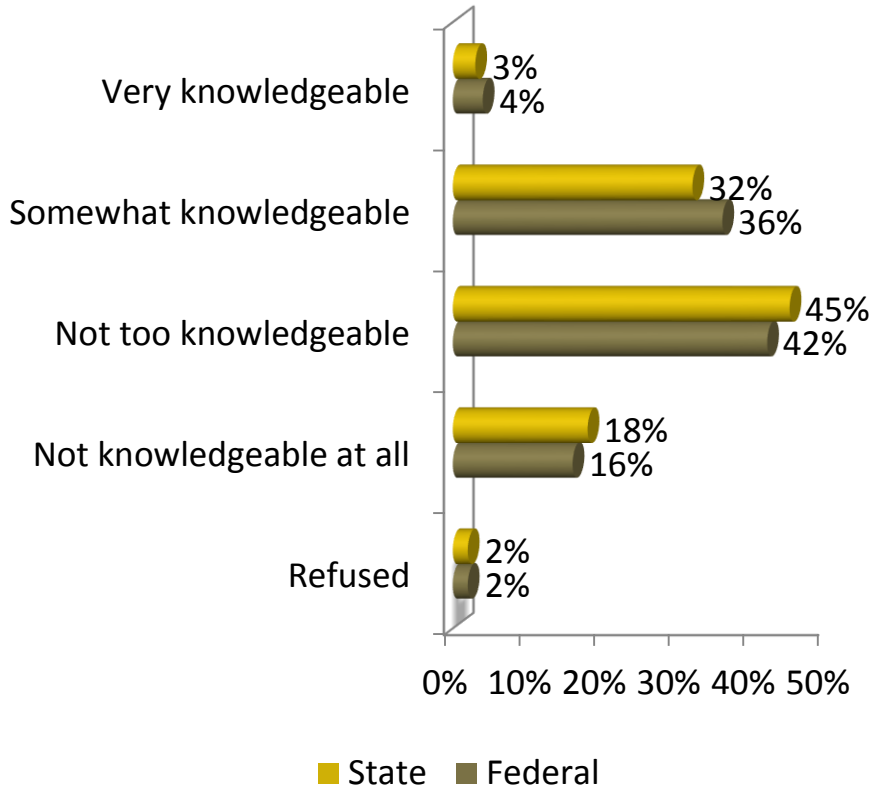




**STRATEGIC PIVOT #2:
JOIN THE REFORM
CONVERSATION**

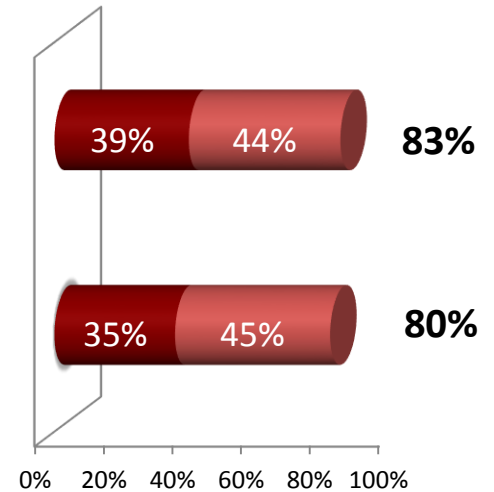
GOVERNMENT BY AND FOR ELITES

CITIZENS DISCONNECTED, DISTANT, POWERLESS



Our tax system is controlled by special interests in Washington.

Our tax system is rigged to benefit powerful interests in Washington.



CLEANING UP THE TAX CODE

View of wasteful, corrupt government exemplified in tax code

Opponents use dissatisfaction to push for lower taxes

“Flat tax” an obvious solution

CLEANING UP THE TAX CODE

- Fewer tax giveaways, less special treatment
- Can't use tricks/influence to avoid
- More trustworthy government
- “For and By the People”
- More revenue
- Critique without undermining government

CLEANING UP THE TAX CODE

MISSED OPPORTUNITY

We need more tax dollars to adequately fund all our responsibilities.

BETTER START

We should clean up and simplify our tax code by getting rid of unreasonable tax breaks.

THE SEGMENTS



Communitarians (16%)



Inattentive Strivers (29%)



Struggling Populists (12%)



Dutiful Discontented (33%)



Resentful Rich (10%)

DISCUSSION

COLORADO – PUTTING ALL TOGETHER

*Our quality of life depends a lot on state revenue to support the roads that let us get around, the parks and outdoor places that are so important to our state's families, the schools that educate our children, the first responders who help in time of need – the list goes on. If we want thriving communities, we have to be willing to pay for them. **That's why citizens should insist the state keep and use all the revenue it collects.** If we want the things that serve as foundations for a strong economy – from modern infrastructure and transportation to great education – we have **to use our state revenue to invest in those things.** You can't get something for nothing.*

TAKING ON ANTI-TAXERS

You can't get something for nothing. So we need to be careful about being against taxes while also complaining about potholes and overcrowded classrooms and other things we need state revenue to fix. If we want thriving communities with quality schools, parks, police, and reliable communications grids, judicial systems, and so on, we have to be willing to pay for them. That's what taxes are for. If we want the things that serve as foundations for a strong economy – from modern infrastructure and transportation to great education – we have to invest our tax dollars in those things. We can't get them for nothing.

TAX CODE

Most people are dissatisfied with the current tax code. It's 70,000 pages long and impossible to understand. It's full of deductions that folks with fancy tax lawyers and lobbyists use to get out of paying. Most of the tax code is about tax breaks that apply only to some people, that the rest of us have to make up for. Some people say it might as well be called the "tax break code." If we simplified the tax code, getting rid of tax breaks, we'd have much more money to invest in the things that make our communities thrive.

WASHINGTON STATE STARTING POINT

We have an amazing quality of life in Washington State. And think about how much of what we enjoy depends on state revenue—the roads that let us get around, the parks and outdoor places that are so important to our wellbeing, the schools that educate our children, the first responders who help in time of need—the list goes on. If we want thriving communities, we have to be willing to pay for them. But we're losing millions in state revenue due to a tax code that includes too many giveaways, money that our communities need to thrive. There should be only one guiding principle for an exception to paying taxes – whether the public will benefit. If we want the things that serve as foundations for a strong economy, from modern infrastructure and transportation to great education, we have to raise the revenue to invest in those things.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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