

Four-way face-off say who wins and loses in the tax and dividend fight

Alaska Dispatch News, [Charles Wohlforth](#), January 13, 2016

Any Alaska budget solution will hurt or protect people in four main groups. In any fair solution, all four have to sacrifice.

The state's budget math doesn't work without capping dividends and using Permanent Fund earnings. But we also need an income tax, budget cuts and repeal of oil tax credits. There is no fair solution without a hit to people with each of these interests.

Where you fit in the four-way tug-of-war depends on how much money you make, how old you are, how many kids you have and what industry you work in.

The guy who explained this situation most clearly to me is the only one I've met who seems able to rise completely above it. Cliff Groh, a lawyer who attended Harvard, has been studying Alaska's fiscal and economic situation for decades as a hobby. He gives lectures and has helped put on more than a dozen public forums on the subject. Since May, he has done nothing else, without pay.

He calls the four-way fight the "Groh Square." That name is his nerdy attempt to wring humor out of this dry stuff. He also sometimes lectures in an Abraham Lincoln costume.

But he refuses to give his own opinion. As the chairman of [Alaska Common Ground](#), a small nonprofit dedicated to educating Alaskans about policy choices, Groh speaks only in favor of knowledge.

"What I often call for is for people to actually understand

what the choices and trade-offs are, rather than having them assumed," he said.

In Alaska, this is revolutionary talk. We're in the habit of making decisions based on slogans. Groh is asking us to think.

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