1983 Idaho Legislature

East Idaho legislators stress conservative views on issues

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the 14th and final in a series of articles giving the views of eastern Idaho legislators on issues shaping up for the coming sessions. This one is a summary.)

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Eastern Idaho legislators in response to 13 questions on major issues looming for the 47th Idaho Legislature indicate a traditionally conservative outlook but a willingness to help solve the toughest session in Idaho history.

This "toughest session" was so labeled by Idaho Gov. John V. Evans and it's highly unlikely anyone would challenge the assessment.

This Legislature faces the need of coping with a $43 million shortfall for the current 1983 fiscal year ending June 30 and at least $70 million for the 1984 fiscal year beginning July 1.

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Nearly all of the lawmakers reluctantly endorse hiking the sales tax from 3 to 4 percent as the best way to solve the financial dilemma. This likely will raise nearly $20 million for the current fiscal year which has less than six months to go and perhaps more than $40 million for the new fiscal year.

The governor has even said it might be necessary to raise the sales tax 2 cents but this is highly unlikely at this time considering the mood of the legislators.

Others have suggested some possible sales tax exemptions, hiring more state auditors to catch the state income tax cheaters, further cuts in state budget, state income tax increase and possibly some other sources, such as drawing on surpluses in state agencies.

The vast majority lean against repealing tax relief granted to business in the last session. These are the keystone proposals in the financial package by Gov. John V. Evans. They include repealing or delaying such business benefits as Job Credit, quarterly instead of annual income tax payments, 10 percent income tax surcharge, income tax carryback, and accelerated cost recovery system.

They all oppose a mineral severance tax, and the governor has not recommended one in view of the current mining slump.

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Compounding the financial problems is the Residential Tax Initiative passed by Idaho voters which calls for expanding the tax exemption from 20 percent of the assessed value of the home to a permanent 50 percent. This is atop the 1 Percent Initiative also passed by the voters in 1980 and now has been amended, calling for no more than 5 percent budget increase for local governments.

Most lawmakers are frankly mystified on how they will implement the initiative. A number say it is unconstitutional and regret that it will shift taxes to businesses and utilities, which would only pass it on to the consumer; and to the farmers, who have no one to pass it to except themselves. Some advocate its delay.

The governor, however, fully backs the initiative as giving a break to the average homeowners and would veto any legislation that would be counter-productive.

Also on the financial level, the majority backs a 2 cent tax hike to keep Idaho's fine highway system from deteriorating.

A few believe the larger federal highway allocation coming to Idaho under the new federal 5 cent gas tax may furnish enough money to avoid the state tax increase.

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Many other issues which ordinarily are considered major may receive scant attention, particularly if they cost money.

Skipping over them rapidly, the majority favor eliminating the May presidential primary and moving the general primary back to August; they're cool to expanding the state energy plan and prefer instead to let free enterprise handle the matter but to protect Idaho water; and they back multiple use land management concept with emphasis for the state getting more federal lands.

They are sharply divided over local option proposals, want tough game violation penalities but no game license increase; say the present legislative reapportionment plan is satisfactory and will change little even if the courts should reject it; and heartily favor stiffer criminal penalties, especially for drunken drivers but little if any changes in the judiciary system.

They are perplexed on what to do in changing the present indigent medical care system to prevent counties from going broke; favor a constitutional amendment to authorize student tuitions to support higher education and also favor consolidation on both the public school and university levels. They oppose salary hikes.

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