

# The Post-Register

## The political pulse

B-8

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, February 10, 1982

Legislative limelights . . .

# Idaho Legislature could adjourn early

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

Talk in the legislative halls is optimistic this session of the 47th Idaho Legislature will end in 60 days or less.

These rumors aren't unusual; but this year there are a number of signs that will happen this year. If it does happen, it would be the first time in a long time; the record was 55 days in 1970.

The legislators could meet their 60-day goal by adjourning March 11, or two days later on March 13.

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The two paramount issues that have delayed the Legislature in recent years — but this session appear for early settlement — are revenue projection and state employee salaries.

Gov. John V. Evans came up with a revenue estimate of \$467.2 million while the Legislative Revenue Projection Committee predicted \$463.4 million. This is only a difference of \$3.8 million, hardly enough to bare their teeth.

Last year, the governor estimated \$438 million while the legislature predicted \$422 million, a wide difference of \$16 million. It sparked a bitter fight, sending the legislature into long overtime.

The governor has recommended a 5 percent public employee salary increase, plus a 1.5 percent merit pay, figures most legislators generally accept. The only scrap possible on this is the 1.5 percent merit pay.

Controversy came up only last week when a legislative committee favored the 5 percent and up to 1.5 percent merit increase, but it only approved \$8.1 million from the general fund to pay for them. The governor's office said it would take \$10.3 million, meaning the merit pay hike may be scrapped.

Last year, the major delay was caused by salaries. Legislators passed a 7 percent increase for state employees but appropriated

only \$4 million which resulted in cutting more than 300 workers, mostly from the Department of Health and Welfare.

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The all important Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee is not progressing any faster than usual but it also doesn't face the financial headaches of the past. The committee finished its action on supplemental requests Wednesday and will now turn to the request from the state agencies. This is suppose to be completed in 45 days, but that deadline has been met in two decades. It might be possible this year.

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Talks has been rife in recent years for return to biennial sessions but as the state has grown and the budget increases, this appears out of the question now. There still appears proposals for biennial budgeting for one year and to handle all other matters except financial on alternate years.

There were biennial sessions from 1890 to 1967 but there were special sessions during that time on many occasions, in 1912, 1931, three in 1935-36, one in 1937, two in 1944, two in 1946, one each in 1950, 1952, 1961, 1964, and 1965 and two in 1966.

Records show a regular session of 75 days and 14 days special session on reapportionment in 1981; and 85 days special session, the third longest in history; and three days special session for welfare, Medicaid, highway and biennial funding, in 1980.

Other recent sessions include 78 days in 1979, 69 in 1978, 71 in 1977, 75 in 1976, 68 in 1975, 76 in 1974, 65 in 1973, 75 in 1972, 69 regular and 18 days special for reapportionment in 1971.

The record was the first session when Idaho assumed statehood in 1890 which spanned 97 days but it was officially in session only 82 days. Up until the start of the 1970s, most sessions finished in 60 days, or within five days of that. The second longest was 89 in 1967 if the 1890 split session is not considered.

The Post-Register

## The political pulse

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Sunday, February 14, 1982

B-11

Legislative limelights . . .

# Election jitters face legislators in Idaho

By BEN J. PLASTINO

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Although barely mentioned, the prospects of facing re-election is in the forefront of the minds of most Idaho legislators who are now toiling at the second half of the 47th Idaho Legislature.

They know all too well what they do — or don't do — will be well remembered by the voters when they return to their home stomping grounds to patch their political fences for the coming campaign.

The election threat thus guides virtually every action they take in legislation.

That's one of the paramount reason there will be no significant tax increase, no inauguration of new programs, or anything that might upset the sensitive constituents.

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Perhaps many Idahoans are not aware but the legislators and other elective offices certainly are, is the fact the primary election is not very far off. It falls this year on May 24 but even more unsettling is the fact the filing is the first seven days in April, only about six weeks away.

It will come little more than a month after the Legislature is expected to adjourn in late March. Past records show very few will need to risk primary competition. The majority, however can expect contest for the Nov. 2 general election.

If any have primary competition and there are a number throughout the state, it means their opponents can begin campaigning in March while the incumbents are tied up with their duties in the Legislature.

However, there is a bill contemplated to move the primary back to July in fear the court may need to settle reapportionment, and this could change the entire campaign strategy.

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Until reapportionment is finally settled, most of the legislators don't even know for certain the boundaries of the legislative districts they will represent. There were changes proposed in the July special session which affected all of

the districts, including the six embracing the 10 east Idaho counties.

The most drastic boundary changes are contemplated for District 27, embracing most of Bingham County; District 29, west Bonneville and Butte; District 30, central Bonneville and Shelley; and District 31, east Bonneville and Teton. Less alterations are planned for District 20, Jefferson, Lemhi, Clark and Custer; and District 28, Madison and Fremont.

Most of the difficulties presently center in the three legislative districts in the Pocatello area, but these in turn have a domino effect on adjacent districts, including those in east Idaho. If the entire reapportionment plan is reopened, then it would be even more traumatic.

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As far as can be determined, all 18 legislators — six senators and 12 state representatives — in east Idaho likely will seek re-election. There have been rumors that some may forego return to the Legislature. However, history has shown that unless an office holder emphatically announce he is not a candidate for re-election, the chances are almost 100 percent he will run.

State Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, and Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, have indicated they are undecided and won't make up their mind until later. Based on the past, the prospects are heavy in favor of their running again. Two or three others also said they are considering retiring but much of this can be taken with deep reservation.

In fact, the turnover in the present Legislature appears the smallest in years. House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, won't return as he is seeking the governorship and Sen. Dean Abrahams, R-Caldwell, has announced he will not seek re-election. Reapportionment may force some incumbents to run against each but they are few, mostly in District 3 in the Panhandle. The situation will clear after reapportionment has been approved.