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Legislative limelights . . .

Election jitters face legislators in Idaho

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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.