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Legislative limelights...

Governor faces tough Legislature combat

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Never has an Idaho governor faced such a gloomy outlook as does Democrat John V. Evans in the coming Idaho Legislature.

The usually cheerful Evans is somewhat somber these days as he prepares to guide the first regular session of the 46th Idaho Legislature starting Jan. 12 for what might be some 70 agonizing days.

They say the burden of command is lonely one but in Evans' case it's almost an ostracism.

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Evans faces a hostile Legislature that carries what appears the largest Republican majority in history, 23-12 in the Senate — just one vote over veto proof — and 56-14 in the House.

He has been heard to remark he feels somewhat like the Lone Ranger.

The besieged governor is in no position to demand any programs — he is hopeful they will follow his recommendations. Already he has shown a conciliatory tone in his statements to the Legislature because it is only by wheeling and dealing that he can get through some of his pet programs.

For example, he has announced he won't even ask for a full-fledged Department of Energy, knowing it has no chance and remembering it was ignored last year. A questionnaire by The Post-Register to the East Idaho legislators and the leadership on principle issues showed not a single lawmaker, including Democrats, favor the plan. In fact, it was the moderate Republicans led by the highly respected Rep. Vard Chatburn, R-Albion, chairman of the House Resources and Conservation Committee, who joined with the Democrats to prevent the dismantling of the skeletonized Office of Energy.

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Evans had poor relations with the Senate Democratic minority leader, Cy C. Chase, St. Maries, in last year's session over highway funding and a number of other issues. His rapport with the new minority leader, Sen. Ron Twilegar, Boise, is considerably better but still far from ideal. Twilegar remarked at the time he was mentioned for the minority leadership that he reserved the right to differ from the governor on some issues, not exactly a harmonious statement.

Evans' relationship with the Senate Republican leadership is a virtual disaster. The boorish Sen. Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, Senate president pro tem, boycotted the weekly breakfast

leadership meetings with the governor last year for the most part.

Evans' relations with most of the other leaders in both the Senate and House, however, is good, and in most instances, warm. Evans has particularly cordial relations with House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, and House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, along with most other members of the leadership in both parties in both chambers.

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As if this isn't enough, Evans has troubles with his own state political family. Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt and Attorney General David H. Leroy, both Republicans, have indicated they are interested in the gubernatorial race in 1982. Of the Democratic elective state officials, Auditor Joe Williams refuses to support him on a number of State Land Board issues and has engaged him in a vitriolic public arguments over trying to move his computer programs and on other office procedures; and Treasurer Marjorie Ruth Moon has gubernatorial aspirations of her own but she likely would never oppose Evans for the nomination.

Other names tossed about in the gubernatorial hopper include Olmstead and former House Speaker Allan Larsen, Blackfoot, who won the Republican nomination in 1978. At the latest word, C.L. "Butch" Otter, Simplot executive and who finished a strong third in the GOP gubernatorial fight in 1978, seems more interested in seeking lieutenant governor, rather than governor.

As if that isn't enough, Secretary of Interior Cecil D. Andrus and a former popular Idaho Democratic governor, is coming back to Idaho. Andrus also would never oppose Evans for the nomination but he'd be looking over his shoulder if he should falter.

Evans can be consoled by the fact that as long as can be remembered there has been constant bickering between the Legislature and governor, regardless of party labels. Republican Govs. Robert Smylie and Don Samuelson, who were the most recent Republicans in the Statehouse, had as much trouble getting their programs enacted as did the Democrats, even through their party was in control.

It's against this tumultuous political background that the harried governor braces himself to confront a recalcitrant Legislature which appears wanting to do as little as possible, and, among many members, creating embarrassment for the governor.