

Legislators split votes on ideology

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The 48th Idaho Legislature is split more widely between conservatives and moderates, rather than between Republicans and Democrats.

This has been verified by votes so far this session on state employee salaries and educational and state funding.

Aside from the well-publicized right-to-work measure there have been few issues which have been split along strictly party lines. The right-to-work measure was passed in both chambers on a strictly partyline vote with only one Republican, Rep. Ed Brown, Pocatello, crossing over to join a solid bloc of Democrats.

Gov. John Evans' veto of the measure also was overturned on a partyline vote. The bill bans compulsory union membership or payment of dues as condition of employment.

Even repeal of the so-called Little Davis-Bacon Act, which calls for prevailing wages, failed to become a partisan issue. Only five Democrats in the 42-member Senate voted against repeal.

The vote was so overwhelming in opposition that Evans let it become law without his signature. He did express disappointment the repeal was enacted.

Perhaps typifying the conservative-moderate split were recent votes on a resolution freezing the salaries of many of Idaho's 16,000 public

employees.

The resolution passed both chambers with a vote to spare. The Senate voted 22-21 with Republican Lt. Gov. David Leroy breaking the tie. It was approved in the House 43-41. This vote stood as a tie of 42-42 for a few seconds but one unidentified vote was switched before the vote was recorded. A tie vote would have defeated the resolution.

All 17 Democrats voted against the resolution and were joined by 24 of 67 House Republicans. In the Senate, the 14 Democrats were joined by seven of the 28 Republicans.

The measure approved about \$520,000 for "reallocations" or changes in job ratings. Agencies will be allowed to grant merit rates but they have to be funded through a reduction of jobs.

The governor recommended a 3 percent across-the-board raise. The Idaho Personnel Commission called for a 5.6 percent hike which would have added about \$10.7 million to state personnel costs.

The measure becomes law because it is a resolution and is not subject to a gubernatorial veto.

It is interesting to note that some eastern Idaho Republicans joined the Democrats in voting against the freeze. It included Sen. Ann Rydalch, Idaho Falls, and Reps. Reed Hansen and Marilyn Stanger, both of Idaho Falls, and John O. Sessions, Driggs.

The so-called Republican "moderate" coalition which joins the Demo-

crats ranges between 20 and 25 in the House and possibly seven or eight in the Senate.

The coalition is actually more conservative than moderate but is not as rigid as compared with the ultra conservatives and right wingers. It may shift several votes in different ballots on education and state funding and perhaps other issues.

Another test will come in balloting on education funding. The rigid Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee has voted for reduced funding for public education and higher education. Both funding recommendations will be sought for increases when they hit the Senate and House floors. It is expected then that many Republicans will join Democrats in an effort to increase the education appropriations.

Generally, it can be said that more than 90 percent of the bills lack partisanship.

After viewing the Legislature for close to half a century, it seems that most legislators are sincere in voting for what they think will be in the best interest of the state and regardless of partisanship. One may not agree with how they vote, but the lawmakers sincerely believe they are voting what they think the majority of their constituents wants and what they believe will best help the state.

For example on the Swan Falls Dam legislation that brings about adjudication of water rights, there are numerous crossovers by both Repub-

licans and Democrats on both side of the issue. This is not because of partisanship but because the lawmakers feel the bills may or may not be for the best interest of Idahoans.

The same can be said on such major controversial legislation as lotteries, child-care licensing, raising the drinking age, transfer of the state liquor dispensary system to private membership, halving the 50-50 tax exemption and a proposal to develop more stringent hazardous waste restrictions.

Then there are many revenue-raising tax bills.

One would double the "head tax" from \$10 to \$20 per tax return and impose a one-time surcharge on income taxes next year for 6 per cent.

Another would increase the state cigarette tax from 9.1 cents per pack to 17 cents, effective Oct. 1 to coincide with the termination of the federal tax.

A third would cut an investment tax credit granted businesses and corporations from 3 to 1 per cent and eliminate another tax credit for new jobs.

The news media publicizes the controversial measures but past election records show those who vote the conservative line generally win their elections.

Each biennium in the past decade has seen more Republicans and less Democrats elected.