

Legislative limelights...

East Idaho legislators views closely followed

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The rigid conservative views of East Idaho legislators were closely followed by the 46th Idaho Legislature, just as has been the case in recent years.

A series of 16 articles that were written in The Post-Register preceding the start of this session pretty well spelled out what the East Idaho legislators would do — and that generally means what would happen statewide.

It affirmed a strong conservative trend on nearly all sectors of state government, perhaps even farther to the right than forecast. In the all important financial line, they were even more stringent than predicted, for example.

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As was predicted the legislators expressed doubt over Gov. John V. Evans' budget recommendations of \$438 million and thus settled on their own revenue projection figures of about \$422 million. As a result, the powerful Joint Finance Appropriation Committee severely slashed financing for public education, higher education, many human services programs in the Department of Health and Welfare, and air and water quality, among others.

They also expressed opposition to any general tax increase and this wasn't even considered in the session. Their main scrap centered on continuance of the Homestead Tax Exemption, the only form of tax relief finally granted after long delays. Some say the 1 percent tax initiative implementation also has brought some tax increase.

They did loosen the pursestrings for increased state highway funding amounting to \$17.8 million for which the East Idaho lawmakers had expressed support and most of the other legislators followed. It was the one bright legislative spot to keep Idaho's fine system of highways from deteriorating.

After considerable jockeying, they finally proposed giving state employees only a slight salary increase, agreeing to 7 percent but not fully funding it by appropriating only \$4 million. It would lop off an estimated 300 workers. It likely faces a gubernatorial veto.

As forecast, they approved college student fee hikes. However, they did not follow their pre-legislative views and did not change the status of Lewis-Clark State College.

They severely reduced funding for public schools and higher education. Those increases only amounted to 7.5 percent for public education,

and 5.6 percent for higher education.

Their worst record was for the Department of Health and Welfare, which did get a 6.2 percent boost, but the JFAC sliced many mental health and relief programs, and even erased the regional administrative and management system.

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Perhaps what the Legislature didn't do overshadows any accomplishments it may have marked up during its 76 days. It destroyed the Office of Energy, the Division of Economic and Community Service, and many bureaus and personnel within DHW and the Department of Water Resources.

The Republican dominated Legislature and JFAC contend this was done to fit the expenditures within the revenue, but much of it was blatantly political because the Republican legislative leadership has shown little sympathy for health services, the energy and tourist offices, and air and water quality. These were the areas that received the deepest slashes.

There was one proposal that surprisingly didn't come about, and that was enactment of the Right-to-Work law after so much support was expressed for it. It was junked by the Senate after the Republican Party executive committee opposed it, mainly because it feared political drawbacks, not because of its supposed merits.

Many legislators also favored changing the election dates, but they were left as they are now after the same GOP committee opposed changing the May primary, also for political reasons in the belief it would give their nominee a better chance to unseat Evans. In turn, the governor opposed convention delegate endorsement for state and congressional candidates. As a result this bill was not pushed in the Legislature.

As expected, they favored legislation to further the Sagebrush Rebellion, did increase Fish and Game Department funding and shunned further regulations on day care centers, shelter homes or other institutions.

As usual, they shied away from giving local option powers to cities, even though these local units of government, which are closer to the people do a better job than does the Legislature.

The Idaho Legislature will go down as accomplishing the least of any in years, but perhaps it was a victim of the times and mood. What will be the future political implications remains to be seen. The statement of Evans that it will react against the conservative Republican legislators in the 1982 general elections remains to be seen.