Legislative limelights...

# How finances develop will show if governor or Legislature is right

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BOISE — After the rhetorics are ended, in the final analysis, it will remain to be seen whether Democrat Gov. John V. Evans or the Republican-controlled Idaho Legislature is right on the fiscal 1982 budget.

The acrimonious debates between the state chief executive and the Republican leaders have furnished much of the front page reading almost from the start of the Legislature in early January.

Both sides may be staking their political fortunes on the line after it is seen whether there is a hefty surplus left in both the 1981 fiscal year ending this June 30, and the 1982 fiscal year ending June 30, 1982. Surpluses will indicate the governor was right; lack of a heavy overflow will show the Legislature was proper in following an austere financial course.

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**If there is a surplus, of say, $12 million or more at the end of this fiscal year, and about as much for the following fiscal year, Evans' assertions that many essential programs were lopped off unnecessarily are substantiated and the Republican legislators may suffer in a backlash in the 1982 general elections. If the tight budgeting continues, then the charge that Evans was overly optimistic and risked placing the state in a deficit status could react against the governor.**

Evans insists that his $438 million general fund budget was tight and the Legislature's action, particularly the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee, in trimming the outlays caused a great disservice to the state.

Both sides have placed their reputation on the line and if one side is wrong it is certain the other side will be quick to pounce on the situation.

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**One of the mystifying ploys — and this has been even mentioned by a number of Republican legislators — is why the Legislature leadership unnecessarily alienated more than 12,500 public state employees, 18,000 teachers and thousands of other backers of education, Department of Health and Welfare and other state programs by the clumsy way they handled the budget setting.**

Maybe these legislators can't count, but this bloc of 50,000 or more voters, including the public employees and teacher and their families and friends, could well determine the 1982 gubernatorial election contest and many legislative races.

On the other hand, many legislators, particularly the moderate Republicans did not approve the actions of their staunch conservative leaders and the JFAC "dirty dozen" penchant for slashing programs.

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**The resignations of two top state administrators, DHW Director Milton G. Klein, and Department of Water Resources Director Steve Allred is only the tip of an iceberg, which indicates the low morale among most state employees. There are more departures immiment and others who will be forced out by the cut in personnel as result of reduced budgets.**

It also must be pointed out the 1982 fiscal year budget of $422.5 million is not a reduction as rhetorics would indicate but is about a 6.5 hike over this year's budget. The budget for public schools gained 7.5 percent, higher education 5.6 percent; and Health and Welfare 6.2 percent. The Republican leadership and the JAFC felt they had to make the hard decisions on this proposed budget slashing.

Killing the regional management and administrative services and bringing drastic cutbacks in drug abuse, mental health and other such programs in the DHW, gutting public television and slicing higher education by $12 million under the governor's recommendation are what the leading critics remember.

The governor named as his leading objections $12 million underfunding of public schools, ouster of the air quality program, virtually wiping out the DWR engineering staff, eliminating public television, not fully funding state employee salary increase and further slicing higher education. He vetoed both the public school and salary bills and and may veto others. His veto was sustained on the salary bill but it was overridden on public school appropriation, which means there will be no changes.

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**The Republican legislative leadership points with considerable credence that the election results indicate people want to cut down government, and this includes state government. The question remains: how much should be the reductions?**

The Democratic financial state boss, Richard Slaughter, risked his professional reputation when he flatly predicted that revenue for this fiscal year will settle near $390 million and for the 1982 fiscal year at $437.5 million.

The Legislative Revenue Projection Committee under Rep. Morgan Munger, R-Ola, has steadfastly insisted the $422.5 million was accurate. He told the Greater Idaho Falls Chamber of Commerce legislative breakfast Thursday there are no plans for revising this projection upwards and reopening budgets.

**It's apparent neither side is going to budge this year, setting the stage for an even more controversial session in 1982. This is just before the May primary election, and the November general election to follow. The same governor and 105 legislators will be back at that time, but both political and financial conditions may have changed. This will be interesting to watch.**