

Statehouse sidelights

Republican educational proposals lack punch

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The Idaho Republican Party under Chairman Dennis M. Olsen did little in its semi-annual meeting last weekend to blunt charges it has failed to strongly back education.

Concerned Republicans know that education will be the No. 1 state issue in the 1984 election campaign and with some fanfare unveiled a nine-point program designed to help improve the quality of education in Idaho.

The only trouble with those recommendations — as commendable as they may sound — is the fact they are ambiguous and lack any specifics relating to money appropriations.

In many ways, they can be compared with the American flag, mother and apple pie to which no one would dare object.

State School Supt. Jerry Evans did say he was pleased the party took a stand in favor of education but that he was disappointed it did not contain any dollar amount.

"It doesn't have everything I wanted," he said in referring to specific appropriations he had asked for at the State Board of Education a week ago. He said he meant to say this rather than the quoted "anything I wanted" appearing in a story after the meeting.

The Republican Party, in fact, virtually ignored his requested appropriation.

Evans did say that what the party recommended meant more money, but added "what they

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adopted didn't speak to any dollar amount." And that's the crux of the issue.

This may be partly Evans' fault because he had a major hand in helping shape up drafting of the recommendations, although he didn't get everything he wanted.

Several leading Republican legislators, particularly Senate President Pro Tem Jim Risch, R-Boise, said bluntly it was doubtful his party would go along with the Evans' recommendations.

Evans requested \$406,364,900 for a state public school budget next year, up 16.3 percent increase or \$57 million from the current budget. This includes all money for public schools, including that from the federal government.

Of this, \$215 million is in strictly state public school appropriation, including money apportioned to the 115 school districts in the school formula, public school employee retirement and school insurance programs. For these comparative categories Evans said he is asking \$276,659,200 for fiscal 1985 starting next July 1, up \$61,659,200. It is almost certain that Gov. John V. Evans also will request about the same increase.

The Republican Party platform does not address itself to these cru-

cial programs specifically. Olsen did say, however, it is the Republican plan to set the guidelines, then discuss dollar amounts later.

The Republican recommendations favor no more school studies in view of the many held in the past, school children need more classroom time, more student discipline, teacher merit pay, statewide achievement testing program, longer school days, fewer school activities and more emphases on basic skills, require all school districts adopt discipline policies, and competency tests for teacher seeking certificates.

Evans emphasized statewide achievement testing program is a new proposal which is significant. Olsen pointed out merit pay and teacher competency tests are particularly important provisions.

Even House Speaker Tom Stivers did better than that when he said some \$30 million increase will be available to public schools, but that's only half of what Evans has asked.

More money doesn't necessarily mean better schools but it is a criterion. Idaho should loosen its pursestrings to avoid the stigma of being near the bottom in the nation in the amount of money it spends per pupil.