

Statehouse sidelights

# Education seems certain winner in 1984 session

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It's rather amusing how Idaho Democrats and Republicans are clamboring to assume the posture they are the true champion of education.

It appears that education cannot lose when both parties are striving to convince the voters they will help education but that remains to be seen.

Actually, it was the Republicans who for 12 years and up to two years ago have appropriated more money for schools than Democratic Govs. John V. Evans and Cecil D. Andrus had requested.

However, in both the 1982 and 1983 sessions the Republican legislators refused to follow the Evans' recommendations. For the current 1984 fiscal year ending June 30, their \$215 million in public school appropriation was exactly the same as the preceding year. It means that because of inflation and higher teacher salaries and equipment costs, schools are getting less money.

As a result, some 40 school districts, or more than a third of the 115 in the state, have had to vote override levies totaling \$33 million, or three times the amount voted annually in recent years.

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Democrats feel they may pick up a number of legislative seats on this issue alone. Republicans, fearful this could happen, presented a nine-point program in an effort to blunt the charges.

Yet many Republican legislators contend there isn't that much support for education and that was the

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reason they did not approve more funding.

This is strictly a partisan issue because only eight Republican legislators in the House, and State Sen. John Barker, R-Buhl, in the Senate, voted against reduced funding.

That means 20 Republican senators and 43 Republican state representatives, or a total of 63 Republicans of the 71, voted for reduced funding. All of the 14 Democrat senators and 19 Democratic state representatives, or total of 33 Democrats, wanted higher school appropriation. Not a single eastern Idaho Republican legislator voted for higher school funding.

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The key education issue centers on the argument by Republicans that they allocated the maximum amount without wrecking state finances. The Democrats, led by the governor, contend there was enough in the anticipated revenue increase to give more.

Many Republican legislators say their constituents tell them in overwhelming numbers, sometimes as much as 20-1, they are against more education funds. They say Gov. Evans is incorrect and that they are much closer to the taxpayers' views.

The state school superintendent, a Republican, Jerry Evans, requested \$406,364,900 for state public schools. This is up 16.3 percent or \$57 million from the current budget and includes all money, including federal funds.

For strictly state public school appropriation that includes the money apportioned to the 115 school districts under the school formula, public school employee retirement and school insurance programs, he is asking \$276,659,200 for fiscal 1985 starting next July 1, up \$61,659,200 from the \$215 million approved the current fiscal year.

The Republican Party recommendations do not address to these crucial financial programs specifically. Idaho Republican Chairman Dennis Olsen said it is the Republican plan to set the guidelines now, then discuss dollar amounts later.

Anyway, a hefty tug of war is already under way between the Republican and Democrats on state school funding. It will continue in increasing tempo through next winter's Legislature and leading to the general elections in November of next year.