

# The Post-Register

## The political pulse

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Legislative limelights . . .

## Idaho's Legislature sputters in dour mood

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BOISE — Many legislators attending the current session here generally agree it will only enact what is absolutely essential — meaning primarily approving a minimum budget.

Unlike most of past recent years, the good natured bantering and camaraderie is missing, that seriousness and terseness dominates the legislative scene.

Almost in once voice, the bored lawmakers say they are not enjoying this session as in past years. They add they want to finish the business on hand as quickly as possible and go home. They are irked because the legislative process is bogging down. They partially blame the free-wheeling Joint Finance-Appropriation Committee for much of this.

Most believe they could adjourn in 60 days, which would be March 11, or finish the week as is usually the case, Saturday, March 13. The earliest guess now is March 20 — providing there are no undue hangups.

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Most of the legislators place this depressed feeling on the sluggish economy which is resulting in tight state financing. Another worry is the realization many face re-election challenges this year. They privately admit the state of the economy and Right-to-Work issue could affect their chances, particularly in the cases of many Republican incumbents.

Although the Legislature is now in its 47th day, it has passed little important legislation. It did enact the Right-to-Work Law but this was vetoed. It also approved legislative reapportionment but this also faces a possible veto. Thus, their efforts along these lines were one of futility — which they knew beforehand.

Another example, is their rejection of a resolution to permit a constitutional amendment to permit increase in university and college tuition. It didn't even hurdle the House but it was certain for defeat in the Senate, anyway.

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The situation doesn't look too bright for ami-

cable settlement of the budget, even though the differences are not wide.

Many lawmakers and political observers believed earlier this paramount financial proposal would be speedily settled because the revenue projections of both the governor and the Legislative Revenue Projection Committee were less than \$4 million apart.

Not so, however.

JFAC — or rather the "dirty dozen" of that committee — is now considering a revenue of only about \$458 million or possibly \$460 million. This is below revenue projection of \$463.4 million by the Revenue Projection Committee and \$467.2 million of the governor. As these were considered budget bone-cutting figures, it could spark a bitter fight in JFAC and the Senate and House floor against further slashing essential programs in education, human services and health.

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The 5 percent wage increase for Idaho's 8,250 classified state employees did pass a week ago by a close vote of 19-16. It had earlier passed the House 42-23 and now becomes law as a resolution does not require the governor's approval.

All of the east Idaho Republican senators except Sen. Mark G. Ricks, Rexburg, voted against the pay hike. In all, nine other Republican senators voted in favor. Two Democrats, Mike Mitchell, Lewiston, and Minority Leader Ron Twilegar, voted in opposition but mainly because they thought it was not enough.

Mitchell warned that the 5 percent raise would leave state employees about 6 percent below the prevailing wage rates for comparable jobs in private industry.

The resolution also allows a 1.5 percent merit increase.

Thus, the battle lines are drawn on many fronts in a Legislature which is none too delighted with its task and wants to go home. This is further encouraged by the more favorable weather and it's time for farm plowing soon. In this, the voting public agrees they should come home — before they do too much damage.