

The Post-Register

The political pulse

A-12

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Sunday, August 9, 1981

Legislative limelights...

Low key Legislature anticipated for 1982

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Statements by one of the leading Idaho Legislature leaders when he was here the past week generally confirms the 1982 session will be no better and could be worse than the lack lustre edition in 1981.

Sen. Mike P. Mitchell, D-Lewiston, Senate assistant minority leader, is viewed by his colleagues as one of the astute legislators who takes a strong advocacy minority role and whose views are highly respected.

Although labeled as a liberal, Mitchell, 56, is realistic and often takes conservative stances on many issues, at times in conflict with Democratic Gov. John V. Evans.

Mitchell was in Idaho Falls to speak to the Rotary Club, primarily on legislative financing and reapportionment, Idaho prison system and to survey his chances of election if he were to enter the lieutenant governor race.

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Mitchell agreed wholly with the Republican leadership that there will be no dramatic increase in state governmental funding for fiscal 1982 and little chance for supplemental appropriations above the proposed \$420 million budget, despite the governor's recommendations for \$440 million.

Mitchell is the ranking minority member of the Senate Finance Committee and is considered the leader of the more moderate factions that want more funding for people's programs. As such, he took the leading part in the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee deliberations in opposing the budget-slashing tactics led by Sen. Dean Van Engelen, R-Burley. With the so-called "dirty dozen" in firm control, Mitchell was generally on the losing end but he did succeed in getting more money for some human service programs by his persistent arguments.

Mitchell, a seventh-term legislators and un-

opposed in recent years, is a native Idahoan, and owned a successful beer distributing business but discarded this a couple years ago in favor of serving as a financial consultant to help establish banks in North Idaho.

Mitchell said he was neither encouraged or discouraged in his current survey on his chances for lieutenant governor. However, he left the definite impression he will not seek the position but rather will go for re-election where he is considered a cinch.

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Mitchell also agrees with such leaders as House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls; Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt and Senate President Pro tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, there are no chances for a tax increase in any field, be it sales, income, and certainly property. On the contrary, there likely will be serious attempts for more tax relief, even though the state is financially strapped, is near the bottom of the list of states in tax loads, and will be further hit by reduced allocations of federal funds.

Mitchell noted there is only a \$1.7 million surplus carried over from the past fiscal year and whether there is an economic upturn is uncertain.

Mitchell points out 1982 is a political year when all legislator positions are up for grabs. As such, they are not likely to impair their chances for slapping on any tax increase whatsoever.

A recent poll conducted by the National Federation of Independent Businessmen showed a 2-1 majority against a 1 cent sales tax hike, or 30 percent in favor, 62 percent against and 8 percent undecided.

Mitchell expressed hope that perhaps a severance tax could be imposed that would bring substantial revenues but the mining and forest industries have shown they have powerful lobbies to thwart this.