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Legislative limelights . . .

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JFAC Eastern Idaho tour help to state

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The Idaho Legislature's influential Joint Finance Appropriation Committee tour of Eastern Idaho early this week may help to give a clearer picture on the financial needs of state facilities.

This committee managed to earn a rather dubious reputation as the prime instigator for cutting state agencies and programs more than necessary in the 1981 session. It was dominated by the so-called "dirty dozen" led by Sen. Dean Van Engelen, R-Burley, which appeared over zealous in cutting Gov. John V. Evans' budget recommendations, particularly in the field of human services, air and water pollution management, both public and higher education, and the entire spectrum of health and welfare.

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Perhaps the JFAC was more right than wrong in its budget-slashing tactics because the 1981 fiscal year ending June 30 finished with about a \$10 million surplus, rather than the \$15 million to \$23 million anticipated by the governor's budget office. This enabled the Board of Examiners made up of the governor, Attorney General David H. Leroy and Secretary of State Pete T. Cenarrusa to restore the 3.85 percent, or \$7.1 million, holdback ordered previously, leaving close to \$2 million surplus.

However, it should be emphasized that the critical cutbacks by the Legislature have also to be considered in context with other legislative choices, but discarded — like a severance tax on minerals, and other tax possibilities.

The JFAC and the Republican leadership of Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, Soda Springs, and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, Twin Falls, didn't even think there would be a surplus, however, and in this the governor was more right than wrong.

The governor contended, with justification, not to lift the holdback and instead carry the \$7.1 million until the current fiscal year and then apportion it to the local school districts to ease the burden of the property taxpayers.

Lifting the holdback did not help the average taxpayers but indirectly benefitted the larger corporations and utilities which don't need it.

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A veteran committee member, Sen. Mike P. Mitchell, D-Lewiston, said federal cuts running as wide as between 15 and 50 percent can be expected.

The members said they are looking for cost-saving procedures for state institutions which are badly overcrowded and need space.

For example, Mitchell mentioned that it is possible the administrative offices at the Eastern Idaho Vocational Technical School can be moved to the new State Building which has room available, particularly with the cutback in Department of Health and Welfare personnel.

John E. Christofferson, EIVTS director, has recommended moving out the offices to provide the urgently needed classrooms for the school.

It certainly would be preferred to moving the administrative offices, rather than classrooms off campus. Christofferson has been shopping for off-campus classroom space, such as at Intersec earlier and more lately the discarded O.E. Bell Junior High School.

Mitchell said there are spaces also in state buildings at Lewiston and Boise which can be used by other overcrowded state agencies. These are example of some of the steps that can be taken to save costs.

Rep. Kitty Gurnsey, R-Boise, committee cochairman, pointed out building requests for the Permanent Building Fund total near \$400 million, yet this fund has only about \$7 million.

THE JFAC members stressed the fact their tour is only one of fact-finding but that it gave them an excellent chance to what is happening at state facilities and how they are stretching the state dollar. What they have learned they can take into consideration when they begin considering the governor's budget requests in the 1982 session in January.