

The Post-Register

The political pulse

A-10

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Sunday, February 22, 1981

Legislative limelights...

Political philosophies clash at Statehouse

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

The contrasting political philosophies between Democratic Gov. John V. Evans and the Republican legislative leadership promise to present more of a hurdle to early Legislative adjournment than any other issue.

These differences prevail on a wide gauntlet of state government but appear to be even more pronounced this year. It could result in more gubernatorial vetoes than usual on legislation. The governor has a solid bloc of 14 Democratic senators who have no alternative but to sustain his vetoes, but he could also get some of the more moderate Republicans. The 14 votes is one more vote than needed to reject any action for overriding a veto.

* * *

Evans perhaps put it as well as anybody when he said in a Post-Register interview last week that the main differences between himself and the Legislature is the fact he "believes in the future of the state" while most Republican legislators are pessimistic. The Republican lawmakers contend a conservative appropriation approach is preferred.

There is much to be said for either view but perhaps a policy of somewhere between the two may be more practical. After the governor and Legislature finish their slugging match, it may result in just such type of legislative appropriations.

The governor said that aside from the lagging construction industry, other segments of business shows signs of an upturn. He optimistically predicted the present 19.5 percent interest rate may sag to 15 percent by spring and if this happens, he said, it would bring a stimulation in housing. He also noted that a 10 percent tax relief promised by president Reagan could be another shot in the arm.

* * *

The latest figures indicate the governor more be more right than the legislators. It shows the state could end up with a \$12 million surplus this fiscal year, rather than the \$3 million deficit of \$380 million.

It would indicate the governor's revenue projection of \$438 million for the fiscal 1982 year

beginning July 1, 1981, may be more accurate than the \$422,250 million the Republican leadership insists is the limit.

It may be well to follow a cautious approach but on the other hand it would be a tragedy to junk valuable programs when it is unnecessary. This could affect public education, including kindergartens; higher education, and the wide range of health and welfare activities.

Once programs are abolished it would take more than a year and considerable effort to re-establish them.

The Republican leadership under House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, and Senate Preisdent Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, score points when they contend it is better to take a conservative approach on spending, thus avoiding the danger of a deficit that could result in another holdback.

* * *

The salary schedule for public employees and teachers is an excellent case in point as it is the key piece in deciding the jigsaw puzzle on state budgeting. Until this is settled, no other agency budgets can be set because the legislators do not know how much money will be available.

The House has favored 10 percent salary increase and the Senate has backed 7.5 percent but but badly underfunded this with only \$4 million when it would take \$15 million or more. As a result, it would lop off from 300 to 1,000 employees.

The governor wants a 6.5 percent salary increase and full funding.

The latest House offer is scaled down to 7 percent and 1 percent merit funding, which is close to the Senate, but the \$4 million cap makes a mockery of the entire funding.

The Republican approach could alienate some 13,000 state public employees and 18,000 teachers. This 31,000 would be augmented by their families and friends that could mean a bloc of more than 50,000 voters who would likely elect a governor.

The governor and Legislature are playing dangerous political games that could backfire. To use these employees as political pawns doesn't help the state administration, Legislature or the state, and least of all, the employees who rightfully feel they are the prime targets of discrimination.