The 1981 Idaho Legislature

Legislators opposed to tax increase

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(Editor's note: This is the second in a series of 16 articles giving the views of East Idaho legislators and the leadership on salient issues shaping up for the coming session.)

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Almost in one voice, eastern Idaho legislators strongly opposed a general tax increase but some did relent enough to say that would consider it if critically needed.

Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, one of the newest members of the Senate Finance Committee, said he did not favor having the sales tax take on the whole burden and may back some increase on the income and other taxes if a tax hike should be deemed necessary. He said a severance tax should be looked at.

Of the leadership, only House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, favored a sales tax increase, and then only if the Legislature could not balance a strictly conservative budget. He said he would prefer this to than shifting the burden of public school funding.

House Majority Leader Walter E. Little, House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge and Senate Majority Leader James Risch all voiced strong opposition to any general tax increase, regardless of circumstances.

Budge said he attached a tax increase to the economy; that if the economy declined, then so should taxes.

Rep. Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, said if there is a need for any general tax increase, he would favor income tax or license fees.

Also expressing opposition to any form of taxes was Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, but she said if it becomes urgently necessary, both the sales and income taxes could be considered. She also said a study should be made as to whether a severance tax on timber and mining products shipped outside the state should be applied.

Rep. Gary L. Paxman, R-Idaho Falls, said he found in questioning various groups during the campaign that they favored an increase in sales tax but how much is questionable.

Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, member of the Senate Finance Committee, said flatly he would not support a general tax increase, adding the message of Nov.4 called for "belt tightening and less goverment spending."

Rep. Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot, said a tax increase should be a last resort, but if one were deemed necessary, he would favor a sales tax.

Sen. William L. Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, said he favored a severance tax and a study of all others.

"I want to make sure, for instance, that the so-called 'sin taxes', cigarette and liquor taxes, are dedicated to the alcoholic programs."

Rep. Linden B.Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, a member of the local government committee, said he would oppose any general fund tax increase, whether income or sales.