Ricks sees state problems

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political edtor

BOISE — Sen. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, touted by many of his colleagues as the next Senate majority leader, said Tuesday the state financial problems the Legislature handled this year don't compare with what faces them in the coming year.

Sen. Mark G. Ricks

Ricks, easily re-elected to a third term, said a combination of state spending cuts ajd increase revenues will be needed to solve the problems.

"The state financial problems are much more severe this year," said Ricks.

Ricks suggested as one revenue-producing measure increasing the state sales tax from 3 to 4 cents on a temporary basis, with a sunset clause, to terminate the increase in a year or so.

"This could be in force until after the economy improves and the present tax base can provide the necessary financing," said Ricks.

Other possible income, he said, would be repealing some exemptions on the sales tax for services.

He also said there are no areas which are immune for spending cuts, except possibly the Department of Corrections which needs financial help to cope with prison upkeep.

"I think that even education may need to take a corresponding cut, along with other state agencies and services," said Ricks, also a member of the Joint Finance-Appropriation Committee.

Ricks noted that education accounts for 73 percent of the funding.

He also said the Department of Health and Welfare which gets some 14 percent of the state funding also may be due for further cuts along with the drastic ones ordered last year.

Regarding his own rumored elevation to leadership as either majority leader or assistant majority leader, he replied "I told them if the (Republican) caucus wanted me to serve, I would respond to them."

Under such a rumored movement, Senate Majority Leader James Risch, R-Boise, would replace Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Boise.