

Legislative limelights

East Idaho legislators gain greater power

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Reorganization of the 47th Idaho Legislature the past two days increased the eastern Idaho leadership power by at least five times and promises to upgrade the political process.

Where Rep. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, held the only leadership post from east Idaho as House minority leader, the reorganization resulted in Sen. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, boosted to Senate majority leader; Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, picked as Senate majority caucus chairman; Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho



Rep. Tom W. Stivers

Falls, chosen House majority caucus chairman, and Rep. Dwight Horsch, Aberdeen, named as House minority caucus chairman.

It's almost a clean sweep as nearly all new leaders were selected to guide the Legislature the coming biennium. Of the 14 leadership slots, only four carry over, three of them in advanced roles.

Perhaps the most sensational and beneficial was the ouster of Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, and replacing him with his next-in-command, Majority Leader James Risch, the knowledgeable and articulate Boise attorney.

Budge has been accused by many of his colleagues as being an obstructionist which on frequent occasions badly delayed the Senate proceedings. His personal grudges were carried to such an extreme that he often boycotted leadership meetings with Gov. John V. Evans. The situation was particularly deplorable in the 1981, 1980 and 1979 sessions but improved in 1982 when Risch took over most of the active floor duties.

In the shuffle, eastern Idaho gained tremendous voice when Ricks and Williams, much to their surprise, were elected, each defeating Dane Watkins. The other Republican leadership spot went to Sen. Ted Sverdsten, R-Cataldo, one of the more moderate lawmakers from north Idaho.

The lineup bodes well because most of the leadership appears far more flexible than the old Republican leader.

The shift is not so much of the present philosophical conservative difference but is mostly interpreted as taking a more positive approach.

There is little question Risch will take a more compromising stand in legislative matters than the inflexible style employed by Budge.

The Senate Democratic leadership headed by the popular Sen. Kermit Kiebert, D-Hope, as minority leader, Assistant Minority Leader Ron Beitelspacher, Grangeville; and Minority Caucus Chairman John Peavey, Carey, should be a pleasant combination to work with the Republicans.

Both Risch and Kiebert excel in the art of compromise.

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Over in the House, it was a mild surprise for Rep. Tom W. Stivers, R-Twin Falls, to outpoll two veterans, Reps. Steve Antone, R-Rupert; and Majority Leader Walter E. Little, R-New Plymouth for the key speakership.

The other top Republican positions went to Rep. Jack Kenneville, Boise, as majority leader; Robert Geddes, Preston, assistant majority leader; and Bateman.

Across the aisle on the Democratic side, Hammond was the only one to retain his leadership spot as minority leader; Rep. Louis Horvath, Pinehurst, stepped up to assistant minority leader from caucus chairman; and Horsch filled the caucus spot.

The only lawmen continuing in leadership are Risch and Kiebert who likewise steps up a position from assistant minority leader to minority leader in the Senate; while in the House, Hammond is the only one to retain his status as the minority leader while Kenneville progresses from assistant majority to majority leader.

Stivers, known for his outspoken views, after the election, commented, "I feel humble and honored and pleased with selection of the rest of the leadership. I feel I can work with the minority party and the governor."

This would indicate a spirit of cooperation, something House Speaker Ralph Olmstead performed extremely well as House speaker the past biennium.

Frankly, many view Stivers with some trepidation, fearing he may not be pliable enough in dealing with fellow legislators.

However, many had the same concept of Olmstead, concerned that his ultra-conservative views would make it difficult. Such proved not the case as Olmstead was considered at the end of his speakership duties by most of his colleagues extremely fair, honest and willing to compromise.

It now remains to be seen how the leaders perform but the fact the economy is in such a deplorable condition may tend to draw the leaders and the governor together to solve a critical state government financial problem.