

Ricks sees windup actions

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

Senate Majority Leader Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, said Tuesday he believes the "pieces are beginning to fall together" so that a budget near \$450 million will be approved.

If this is the case, it's possible the Legislature could adjourn Saturday but he said because of some delays in getting revenue bills out of committee it likely "will spill over to next week."

Ricks said at a Senate-House leadership late Monday afternoon, revenue-raising measures were discussed in an effort to fit with the budget.

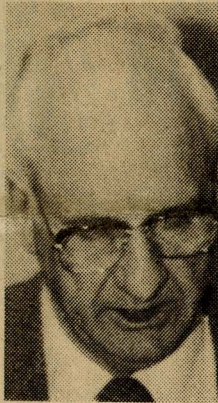
He also said an Easter recess that allows adjournment from Friday noon to Monday morning received favorable reaction.

Ricks said the revenue sources have been found for a \$440 million budget but \$10 million more must be found to increase the amount to meet the objections of Gov. John V. Evans who wants a budget of at least \$460 million.

Ricks expressed hope a compromise between the Legislature's \$440 million and the governor's request for at least \$460 million will settle at the midway point, or \$450 million.

Asked where the extra \$10 million can be found, Ricks responded "I don't know," but he has suggested another sales tax increase as the last choice if necessary.

Ricks noted most of the committees have about completed their work, leaving the revenue raising measure last, including the major ones of public school and higher education fund. These



Sen. Mark G. Ricks

have generated the main controversies so far in the session.

He noted the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee of which he is a member approved \$1.1 million more for the Department of Correction than originally sanctioned.

This committee has been meeting about two hours daily so far this week to complete its approval of state department budgets.

Ricks said the committee is expected to terminate its task Wednesday or Thursday at the latest, then adjourn for the session. The major appropriations to be approved include public school, higher education and the governor's office.

"We don't expect to consider further supplemental appropriations," said Ricks.

Ricks observed this committee took the first 40 days of this session to approval appropriations to make up a \$69 million shortfall for the 1983 fiscal year, then turned to its primary task of sanctioning the 1984 budget.

"It has seldom happened that we have had to spend this amount of time on the past year budget," he said. "Our main task is to approve the one for the coming year."

He said the House Revenue and Taxation Committee, where revenue measures originate, is grinding out the bills. Many are now coming to the Senate committees, mostly the Local Government and Taxation Committee chaired by Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls.

Ricks noted Watkins has failed to boot any of these bills out so far but anticipates action Wednesday. Among the major ones are the 1 percent increase in corporate tax, 2 percent hike for corporations with a taxable income of more than \$100,000, and modifications on the Job Credit and Business Investment measures.

Ricks also voiced action for the House-passed 3-cent gas tax hike which has been held by the Senate Transportation Committee. He noted at least a 2 cent increase is needed to keep Idaho's highways from deteriorating.

Indigent health care bill pushed

By BEN J. PLASTINO
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BOISE — Although time is fast running out, Chuck Holden, executive director of the Idaho Association of Counties, is hopeful of pushing through an indigent medical bill that will ease the crushing financial burden for many counties.

Holden said in a Post-Register interview that previous legislation has received less than enthusiastic response. His House Bill 310 calls for all of the original provisions except it limits property tax certification to the actual expense of the prior year.

"It will require counties to operate on registered warrants which will carry interests of 10 to 13 percent," said Holden. "It does have that problem but we are asking for comments to see if action can be taken."

The bill is under consideration this week in the House Health and Welfare Committee.

Holden said key provisions call for partial payments for indigent medical care after an investigation of the income capabilities of the applicant; that the reimbursement rules be based on the same formula as for Medicaid and Medicare; and clarifying a constitutional question regarding compliance with the federal rules.

Holden said counties have pushed for a clause requiring indigent patients to pay at least a part of their bills to help defray the rising indigent costs which have almost threatened to bankrupt some counties.

Generally the federal rates vary among hospitals but they average about 15 percent in Idaho.