

Politics

The Post-Register, Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, April 13, 1983

Legislative limelights

Region's solons show strength

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

Eastern Idaho legislators, noted for their deeply conservative image, showed strength and performed well in this 47th Idaho Legislature.

Their views, as has been the case in most past years, prevailed to reflect their constituents' sentiments for a minimum of tax increase and to finance state government at the lowest level possible. They felt this was the message given them in the 1982 general elections in view of the weak state and national economy.

In spite of this, the majority voted for the 2-cent gas tax jump, a 1-cent sales tax hike, and modifications in the Job Credit, Investment Credit, and corporate taxes that resulted in tax increases.

However, did they drag their feet in the matter of adequate funding for the wide spectrum of education, and more particularly for health, welfare, and for public environment.

From that point of view, this Legislature may be one of the worst ever, but tight financing is some of the cause.

For the first time in several years, the East Idaho delegation had five legislators in leadership, two in the Senate and three in the House. They included Senate Majority Leader Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg; Senate House Caucus Chairman J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls; House Majority Caucus Chairman Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls; House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg; and House Minority Caucus Chairman Dwight Horsch, D-Aberdeen.

Also in powerful positions were the committee chairmen, Sens. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, Local Government and Taxation; Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, Agricultural Affairs, and William L. Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, Business and Labor, in the Senate; and Reps. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, and Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, Education. Floyd, however, only served a third of the session

before taking leave to spend time on personal business as a potato warehouse manager

The two neophytes, Reps. J.C. Chadband, R-Idaho Falls, and JoAn Wood, R-Rigby, also performed well. Chadband was considered by observers and veteran newsmen one of the more promising newcomers while Mrs. Wood, although at low profile, worked hard and effectively in committee.

Among those considered the most influential in their diligence on certain pieces of legislation were Hammond, who used his House minority party to get many Republican concessions; Sessions, instrumental in bringing about a much-needed 2 cent gas tax hike and higher truck fees to maintain and improve state highways; Ricks, one of the busiest leaders in the session; and Bateman, who as House caucus chairman helped shape sentiment for important legislation.

A recent list compiled by the liberal Lewiston Morning Tribune of the best and worst lawmakers can be viewed with reservation and some humor. This was headed by the paper's political editor, Jim Fisher, who appeared at the Legislature for the first time. He said the poll was conducted among representatives of newspapers and broadcasters, and it must be observed most of them have not been around very long.

Most of these are of obvious liberal philosophies as reflected in giving their best rankings to the more moderate legislators and the lowest marks to the more conservative legislators, with ability apparently largely disregarded.

The Post-Register, the second largest paper in the state to the (Boise) Idaho Statesman, did not participate in this poll.

In final analysis, it is the popularity poll among the voters in the legislative districts which counts — not the news representatives — and that's the reason the present legislators are serving the state, regardless of what the comparatively inexperienced news media representatives think.

Legislative limelights

1983

Legislators star in 1983 session

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

In every Legislature there are always a few who stand out because of their ability and leadership.

They are the ones who sometimes are not in leadership positions but nevertheless exert tremendous influence in the less publicized committee meetings, caucus sessions or just informal sessions. Some have less flamboyant styles than others but it doesn't mean they are less effective.

It can be said the 1983 session was no exception but because of its record length, frightful financial problems and deep philosophical schism in both chambers and parties, it was very difficult.

The east Idaho legislators, for example, were probably the most conservative of any section in the state. The group was therefore inclined to be downgraded by veteran observers. Yet, it was their philosophy which dominated much of the legislation enacted, like it or not.

According to an observer of nearly 40 years on the political scene, perhaps the outstanding accomplishment was turned in by the leadership in the Senate of both parties, the House minority leadership, and with some reservations the House majority leadership.

Wednesday's column mentioned the eastern Idaho legislators in leadership and committee chairmen who exerted tremendous influence. Special praise was given to Senate Majority Leader Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg; House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg; House Majority Caucus Chairman Linden B. Bateman; and Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, chairman of the Transportation Committee.

There were others who performed well in committee meetings and behind the scenes where this is less publicity, including all the eastern Idahoans. Among these were Sens. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot; Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby; Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls; and J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls. In the House were Reps. Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls; J. F. Chadband, R-Idaho Falls; Gary L. Paxman, R-Idaho Falls; and Rich Orme, R-St. Anthony. Crystal, one of the staunch con-

servatives, must be admired for having the courage to switch his vote for the sales tax hike to enable the session to wind up. It must have been agonizing for him to do so.

The finesse between Senate President Pro Tem Jim Risch and Senate Minority Leader Kermit Kiebert was perhaps one of the outstanding accomplishments in the session.

The outspoken and inexperienced House Speaker Tom W. Stivers had a much more difficult time but other members of the team, Bateman, Majority Leader Jack Kenneville and Assistant Leader Bob Geddes, R-Preston, functioned well. The House minority leadership under Hammond was extremely effective.

The minority Democrats in both the Senate and House teamed up with the moderate Republicans to get enacted the more progressive legislation. Of course, they were backed by Democrat Gov. John V. Evans whose vetoes were always upheld and gave him and the Democrats a powerful voice in a dominant Republican setting.

Besides most in the leadership and east Idaho, there were other highly respected legislators from other sections in the state.

Those in the Senate included Sens. John M. Barker, R-Buhl; Gail Bray, D-Boise; Norma Dobler, D-Moscow; Roger Fairchild, R-Fruitland; Laird Noh, R-Kimberly; John T. Peavey, D-Carey; William Ringert, R-Boise; and Walter N. Yarbrough, R-Grand View.

In the forefront in the House were Reps. Steve Antone, R-Rupert; Tom Boyd, R-Genesee; J. Vard Chatburn, R-Albion; Larry EchoHawk, D-Pocatello; Kathleen W. Gurnsey, R-Boise; Chris Hooper, R-Boise; Dan Kelly, R-Mountain Home; Lawrence Knigge, R-Filer; Walter E. Litte, R-New Plymouth; Patricia McDermott, D-Pocatello; Dwight Horsch, D-Aberdeen; and Mack Neibaur, R-Paul.

But this can be said. Virtually all legislators are dedicated men and women. In their own way they support and vote for legislation they believe sincerely to be in the best interest of the state and representative of the constituents of their district.