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Legislative limelights

Region's solons show strength

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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 did 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.

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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.

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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.