Legislative limelights

Fund hike chances dim at legislative special session

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Perhaps Gov. John V. Evans can pull the rabbit out of the hat but expressions from the vast majority of the ruling Republican legislators would indicate slim chances for increased educational funding in the scheduled special session next week.

In fact, many of the Democratic legislators feel less than enthusiastic for more education appropriation, but out of party loyalty to the Democratic governor, likely will support him in the voting.

The latest prediction of an additional $17 million in revenue apparently has not changed the minds of Republican leaders.

Evans expressed delight over this unexpected windfall in a talk in Idaho Falls Thursday morning and suggested it can be used to meet his request for increased education funding.

Comments from Republican leaders headed by House Speaker Tom W. Stivers have thrown cold water on this; he insists the money, if it materializes, should be used to help pay the $69.2 million shortfall for 1983 fiscal year.

The governor has asked for $13.2 million more funding — or $9 million for public schools, $3 million for college and universities, and $600,000 each for vocational education and agricultural research-extension. This is above the legislative-approved $215 million for public schools, $70 million for colleges and universities, $13.4 million for vocational education and $8.6 million for agricultural research-extension service.

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The governor is apparently banking on a groundswell by parents and other education backers to insist on more funding but so far legislators said they have not heard any loud clamor. Most say their constituents have insisted they hold the line.

The beleaguered governor feels the two alternatives that do not call for increased taxes will turn the tide. The first is the anticipated $17 million and the second calls for quarterly income tax payments for individuals with a taxable income of $50,000 or more. It would affect less than 10 percent of the corporations and 2 percent of the individuals — in other words, the more affluent corporations and people.

The governor has doggedly traveled the entire state giving talks in behalf of his program.

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There is little question more education funding is needed in Idaho, which now ranks 49th in the amount if spends per pupil and may sink to last behind Alabama.

From this distant east Idaho view it would appear the best approach was for the governor to have frankly talked face-to-face with the Republican leadership on what could be done.

Instead, exactly the opposite took place. At the close of the session, the Republicans submitted a letter to the governor signed by all but three of the 75 Republican legislators saying they had gone as far as they could and would not consider further tax increase. They itemized enacting 10 bills that raised $138,540,000 in increased taxes, the most of any Idaho legislature in history.

The governor thanked the bearer of the letter, House Majority Caucus Chairman Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls. Four hours later he announced he would call a special session.

The prospects seem to indicate no more money to hold a special session, loss of time for the 105 legislators, and generating political ill feeling all around.

It is against this gloomy controversial background that the Legislature is meeting. It's apparent from numerous statements, the Republican leadership plans to pass the same bills that the governor vetoed, and then go home.