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Legislative limelights

Special session may have been worth cost, effort

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The special session earlier this month may have been worth the cost and trouble in clearing the decks for the 1984 regular session on how large a slice education should be given from the general fund budget.

Up to this year, the Republican controlled Legislature has in recent times actually generally appropriated more money for education than recommended by Gov. John V. Evans. It certainly didn't this year but it still didn't do all that bad, either.

It must be remembered the governor first recommended a budget of about \$474 million. The Republican leadership at first said only the revenue projection of \$394 million was the best it could do. In the end, a \$451.6 million budget was adopted, meaning the Legislature went more than two-thirds of the way in its compromises.

Actually this was a surprise to most disinterested veteran observers and was clearly a victory for the governor. Apparently the governor didn't think so or was not satisfied. He called the special session which only reaffirmed, as forecast, what it had done in the regular session.

Legislative Budget Office Director John C. Andreason placed the cost of the session at about \$20,000. The costs were reduced because the 70 House members wrapped up their task in one day but the 35 senators toiled three days.

It was observed previously that House Speaker Tom W. Stivers, R-Twin Falls, steamrolled the session to bring it to an end as quickly as possible. He did this, even to the point of rejecting the governor's request to address the joint session, tossing all the education appropriations into one omnibus bill, referring the bills to the House Ways and Means Committee which he directs and not the germane House Appropriation Committee, and quickly adjourned the House on the first day without waiting for the Senate.

His tactics angered the Senate Democrats, who then in partial retaliation, decided not to suspend the rules on educational funding and carried the session over for three days.

The prolonged debate in the Senate on the final day gave opponents and proponents an excellent opportunity to air their views.

Those who heard the arguments agreed there were many excellent points expounded that can be considered in the future.

The debate didn't change a single vote, as expected, but it apparently convinced many of the Republican legislators (many of the House members heard the argument in the gallery) that perhaps more education money could be given in supplemental appropriations when the regular session meets next January.

The Senate arguments centered mostly on Democrat contention that some \$19 million more in anticipated funds could boost the education kitty. The Republicans said such money should be retained to pay off the 1983 fiscal shortfall debts which amounts to about \$70 million. In the final showdown only one Republican senator and nine Republican state representatives voted essentially for more funding.

Most believe this may have a strong influence in many more of the less conservative Republicans favoring more generous education funding in the 1984 session, not only for forthcoming 1985 fiscal year but perhaps beefing up some 1984 school programs.