

Politics

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Legislative limelights

Legislature gets praise on decorum

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

This 47th Idaho Legislature, if nothing else, handled itself with decorum despite its admittedly worst financial problems in history.

Both Democratic Gov. John V. Evans and the Republican-controlled Legislature faced a common problem but they saw the solutions in different light.

Overall, the Idaho Legislature may not be viewed as the brightest in the nation but in decorum it doesn't take a back seat to any other. It probably is in the van, as many impartial observers will verify.

Attaches and others who have served in other state legislatures say they find the Idaho lawmakers superior in the dignified manner in which they go about their state business.

Lawmakers in other states, say these outside observers, often appear with unkempt beard, long shaggy hair, unshaven, and slovenly dress. Drunkenness and rudeness is not uncommon.

These are traits seldom seen at the Idaho Capitol. Idaho legislators have a self-imposed dress code which requires coats and ties for men and neat apparel for the women. It is closely followed.

After viewing the political scene for close to 40 years, it's rather remarkable there have been no Idaho lawmakers or even high elective Idaho officials ever accused of such serious charges as

bribery, kickbacks or crooked tricks that would cast doubt on their integrity.

These types of criminal violations appear all too frequently in Congress and in many other state legislatures, it might be added.

The only brawl in recent times that this writer can remember took place in the last session. In that case, Sen. J. Wilson Steen, R-Glenns Ferry, struck Sen. Vernon Brassey, R-Boise, twice on the face after being called a profane name by Brassey.

This incident took place in a corridor outside of the Senate room during a recess. Brassey later publicly apologized to the Senate.

Neither are back this session. Brassey was defeated in the primary for re-election and Steen did not seek re-election.

Perhaps the worst situations come about when lawmakers are frequently entertained by lobbyists at dinners, luncheons, receptions and others social.

Yet, these appear accepted and give the legislators opportunities to shave their living expenses. Reports showed lobbyists spent more than \$60,000 for this entertainment the first two months of the session.

Also there are many obvious cases in which there are conflict of interest and strong favoritism on many measures.

Yet, Idaho's legislators are paid the seventh lowest in the nation. It often raises the question jokingly if they are paid what they are worth.

Rigby solon lauds new indigent care measure

By BEN J. PLASTINO

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State Rep. JoAn Wood, R-Rigby, said although the newly-passed indigent medical care bill falls far short of perfect, it will greatly help counties with such heavy costs.

Mrs. Wood, a member of the House Health and Welfare Committee, who took a leading part in revising the bill, said it particularly would help such a county as Bonneville which had had heavy costs.

"This bill limits counties to 72 percent of the cost," she said. "In Bonneville's case which had \$500,000 in claims, it would save about \$150,000."

She explained the costs vary among hospitals but in the Idaho Falls Consolidated Hospitals, the federal agencies pay 72 percent of what the counties and hospital patients pay.

She also said it sets up a system for

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relatives to help pay for indigent care although it is not mandatory.

"In view of the circumstances and what we have had to face, this is a wonderful bill," she said.

The Idaho Association of Counties drew up the bill which allows counties to pay the federal discounted charges and try to recoup at least a portion of each bill from the patient. It also exempts counties from the freeze imposed by the 1 Percent Initiative.

Mrs. Wood said it also may enable counties to avoid issuing tax warrants to pay the outstanding bills.

Also important, it eliminated the "regular" cost, so that the counties will be paying Medicaid rates.

In Bonneville, \$172,000 indigent medical budget for fiscal year beginning Oct. 1 has been exhausted. The county has approved \$191,000 in claims but has no money to pay them. Another \$272,000 in claims is pending.

She and Chuck Holden, executive director of county association, agreed last year's law which set up a catastrophic insurance fund system did not work and failed to attract any county for participation.



Rep. JoAn Wood