

Special session stirs hot political issues

BY BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

BOISE — The antics of the Idaho Legislature at its special session Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday left the Idaho populace perplexed. But it created political issues that can be aired in the upcoming political campaign.

Briefly, the Republican controlled law-making body turned thumbs down on all four main proposals, but managed to find time and money to fund its own legislative staff to the tune of \$891,000. The legislative candidates can argue the merits of these proposals during the short time left before the May 27 primary election and to greater lengths for the Nov. 4 general election.

Legislators failed to appropriate increased highway funding and \$450,000 supplemental appropriation for Aid to Dependent Children.

They also refused to consider legislation for biennial budgeting and to properly amend the law to give the Department of Health and Welfare better cost control for Medicaid patients.

The proposals Gov. John V. Evans placed on the call were generally non-partisan and the vote in most cases cut across party lines.

It was the attitude of most legislators they were not going to take any action which would upset voters, and this meant increased appropriations for highway funding and welfare cases.

These are the men and women who are elected by their constituents to represent them and do what the could to help the state. Yet the majority, fearful of the May 27 primary election around the corner, acted irresponsibly in abrogating their duties.

The vast majority in the House, and this included the lawmakers from the extreme right to the extreme left, voted for \$450,000 funding for the 14,000 dependent children.

The Senate Republicans except for Sen. John Barker, R-Buhl, voted against this funding, contending they were told the Department of Health and Welfare has enough funding from other sources to pay the relief cases during June of this fiscal year. It may be they're right, but if they aren't it will mean persons receiving this type of support may go hungry because counties just don't have the financial resources to help much.

The Post-Register The political pulse

Turning down a proposed \$20.4 million increased funding for highways will cost this state

Idaho, Sunday, May 18, 1980

much more in the long run — and most of the informed lawmakers know it. For example, \$9.3 million dollars in federal aid projects in East Idaho — most of them to complete reconstruction of Freeway 20 in the Rexburg area — will be delayed at least six months and maybe more, and another \$1.7 million in what is known as state safety projects, most of them in the Idaho Falls area, are obliterated.

The refusal of the House to approve the increased truck registration fee brought the defeat of the entire seven-bill package on grounds that if legislators wouldn't increase the truck tax, then vehicle owners should not be asked to pay 2 cents per gallon more state tax.

Actually truckers are primarily responsible for the wear and tear of Idaho's fine highway system and they haven't had a tax increase for 26 years.

Yet it was mostly the North Idaho legislators who brought defeat to the bill on grounds North Idaho loggers couldn't afford the increase because of the depressed lumber industry. Yet it has been these same North Idahoans who complain their roads have been neglected in comparison to South Idaho.

The Medicaid law change defeat can be blamed on the House, which apparently succumbed to the nursing home lobby. The Senate, mostly Sens. Barker and Edith Klein, R-Boise, presented a bill which appeared to restrict cost containment for Medicaid patients. They admitted it was a stopgap measure. The House refused to accept the Senate version, sticking by a bill that still gave the nursing homes the decision on what are reasonable costs.

The state may now be held liable to pay the delinquent costs which at last report were trimmed from \$4 million to \$3 million.

The state plans an appeal to the Supreme Court against an adverse district court ruling. And what the outcome of this will be is a moot point. * * *

Perhaps the demise of the biennial budgeting can be justified because there were three bills, none of which won even a majority support. Most legislators may be correct in their assessment that this was not an emergency measure that could wait for the regular session.

This bill has been kicked around for a dozen years and hasn't got far, although most admit it will save time and money and bring more efficiency to the legislative process.

The best guess is that legislators are not anxious to come home in 30 days after enjoying themselves in the milder Boise climate.

Anyway, as one would say in warfare, the battle has been joined.

After watching the shifting political scene these 35 years, it would be a fair observation to say that there will be no great upheaval in the legislative makeup. Most of the old faces will return but it must be admitted there could be some changes that might be significant.

Among these possible changes are gain of two seats by the Democrats which would give them control of the Senate, and with it, the important committee chairmen.