Legislative adjournment fiasco

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reflects weak leadership

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BOISE — The fiasco over efforts to adjourn the Idaho Legislature reflects the weakness of the Republican leadership, particularly Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead.

The legislature is now scheduled to go back in session Monday after the Senate attempted prematurely and apparently illegally to adjourn sine die (indefinitely) Thursday afternoon.

Attorney General David H. Leroy issued an opinion that one chamber could not adjourn without consent of the other and the House passed a concurrent (joint) resolution 69-0 against adjournment. The upshot now is for both chambers to return Monday to finish their work.

After most of the senators left Thursday afternoon to return to their homes, the House still was in session until 6 p.m. Thursday and then met again Friday for a short time. It now waits for the Senate to act Monday.

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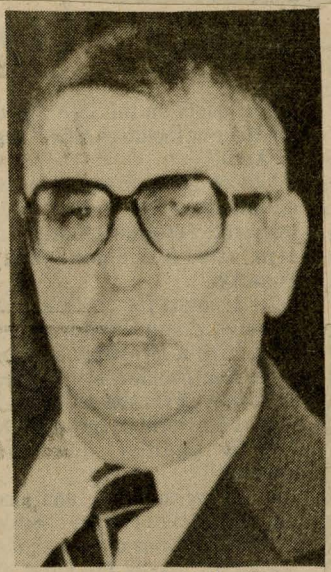
The legislature at the start, known officially as the second regular session of the 45th Legislature, was believed one of goodwill and one that would finish its deliberations in the constitutional 60 days, or maybe even less.

Never has such a ludicrous development as took place in the Senate happened in the Idaho Legislature before. It showed the highest irresponsibility on part of the Senate Republican leadership, particularly Budge and the majority leader, Sen. James Risch, R-Boise.

It certainly paved the way for new leadership when the Senate reconvenes in 1981.

The Legislature will now meet for the 85th day Monday (Saturdays and Sundays are counted), the third longest in history dating back to the first one in 1890. It is leaving a trail of bitterness among most of the leadership, and between the top Republican leaders and Democratic Gov. John V. Evans.



Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs

It draws taut party lines and also creates a schism between the Senate and House.

Any talk of a gubernatorial recall can be discounted because the number of signatures and the number of votes to accomplish this is almost prohibitive.

Besides that, it comes from the vocal right wing faction which is disgruntled by the governor's justified veto of a bill that would have put zoning and planning questions up to a vote in each county and virtually emasculated the present land-use planning.

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The two most responsible for dragging the Legislature unusually long were Olmstead, and Budge, particularly Budge who took a strong negative positions on many issues.

Most other members of the leadership were at least willin to talk compromise and kee the lines of communication open but the partisa maneuverings only prolonge the session.

The Democrats didn't hel matters. Senate Minorit Leader Cy Chase, D-St. Maries took a leading hand in no compromising on some issues and even torpedoed some of the governor's programs, the 2 cent state gas tax hike in particular.

Votes on key issues generally were not along party lines, but mostly on philosophical pattern. In both the House and Senate, the Republican moderates frequently voted with the Democrats. Yet, in many cases, the Democrats failed to hold firm and often peeled off from the rest of their party colleagues.

It wasn't bulk of the legislators who were partisan and uncompromising, but most of the leaders, including both Republicans and Democrats.

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Rep. Wayne E. Tibbits, R-Rigby, issued a statement in jest comparing the antics of the Legislature with the situation in Iran but it carried a lot of truth.

For those who missed his sardonic expression, Tibbitts said he and his fellow legislators felt much like the hostages in Iran, comparing the legislative leaders to the Iranian leader, Ayatollah Khomeini.

"If you think there is confusion in Iran, you should see this Legislature," he quips. "All of our leadership people are ayatollahs in themselves. We in the House don't know what is going on in the Senate and they in the Senate don't know what's going on in the House. These ayatollahs (leaders) don't understand each other and they can't agree with each other. We don't know which ayatollah is in charge for the day, and for that matter, neither do they."

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The delays mostly came about by the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee taking too partisan a stance in slashing the governor's budget on many fronts, and finishing up far later than usual.

Then the special committee under Rep. Morgan Munger, R-Ola., sought to solve the tough 1 percent initiative implementation. After many days of deliberation it finally decided it couldn't come up with a bill satisfactory to the local units of government. It recommended extending the freeze another year, but with a 6 percent growth factor.

The Senate, mostly led by Sen. Edith Klein, R-Boise. refused to accept this, leaving the present dangerous situation.

The 85 days are the longest behind the 97 days in the first session in 1890 when Idaho assumed statehood and the 89 days in 1969.

Figuring it costs $14,000 a day when the Legislature is in session, that means the taxpayers footed a bill for more than $350,000, for the 25 days it went beyond the 60 days that should have been enough.

The Senate caper costs the taxpayers $56,000 more, because instead of adjourning Thursday night, it continues four more days at a cost of $14,000 a day.

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