Legislative limelights . . .

Staff funding issues hint session troubles

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Gov. John V. Evans' call for a special session of the Idaho Legislature lists four items. But the one he omitted is the one that will give him and the Republican leadership the most trouble.

The proposal that lurks in the background and may determine how speedy and how effective the Legislature will perform is funding for the both the legislative staff and the governor's staff.

This was hinted at a pre-legislative workshop conducted in Idaho Falls by top state government executives before East Idaho legislators Wednesday afternoon. Fourteen of 18 legislators representing 10 counties were on hand to hear the presentation on Aid to Dependent Children, Medicaid and highway funding. For the most part they accepted the explanations, but certainly gave no assurance they would go along.

However, Rep. Doyle C. Miner, R-St.Anthony, the retiring chairman of the House Appropriation Committee, may have reflected some legislative thinking when he said Republican legislators should make certain legislative staff funding is added to the call, and passed and signed by the governor before the other matters are considered.

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Listed on the agenda are $15 million more in state highway funding increasing by 2 cents per gallon a tax on gasoline and diesel fuel and truck registration fees; $450,000 supplemental appropriation for June payments for Aid to Dependent Children; change in law to bring about valid Medicaid cost controls as result of an adverse district court ruling; and instituting the long-discussed biennial budget sessions.

None of these issues are exactly partisan and perhaps will be generally accepted without much controversy. Actually the most pressing one is ADC. Without action, some 8,000 welfare recipients will receive only a fourth of their meager subsistence payments. It would be desirable to enact the others for economic reasons, but they are not pressing and could wait for the regular 1981 session, which will convene in January.

As a conciliatory move, the governor did not insert a funding request for the Office of Energy, preferring to wait until the next session in hopes a more friendly Legislature will be elected. He said he felt by using personnel from other state agencies the office could function until the end of the year.

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Funding for the governor's eight-person staff and for the Legislative Auditor and Fiscal Office and Data Center, with staffs of some 47 people is rather complex and highly partisan. The governor said he will not budge on this issue because the eight members of his budget and planning bureau would reduce his staff by 25 percent, even though it looks small by comparision.

The Republican leadership asserts it could shift enough money to keep its staff on the payroll for remainder of the year, although there likely would need to be cuts. However, even some Republicans question whether the Legislature should have this large of a staff.

The governor contends it has been traditional for the Legislature to honor the state executive's request for his own staff. He thus resents the Legislature's intrusion and brands it strictly political.

On the other hand, the governor's veto of the $1.5 million legislative staff appropriation in retaliation was also political, rather than based on merits.

Thus is the stand off between the Democratic governor and the Republican leaderships.

The governor is now hoping that when the 105 lawmakers gather under the Capitol dome more understanding Republican legislators will prevail on their leadership to consider some compromise. This is the key issue that will determine the course of the special session. The governor is now contemplating calling a meeting of the leading Republicans Monday morning to pave the way for a compromise.

The governor explained he omitted the staff funding because in earlier conferences with the Republican leadership there was no solution that came forward to settle the issue. It is obvious, then, that he is holding this as a club over the heads of the Republican leaders.

The relationship is worse between the governor and Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, and Senate Majority Leader James Rish, R-Boise, but less so with House Speaker Ralph Olmstead and the other House leaders and with other leaders in the Senate.

The mood of the governor and the Republican leaders Monday morning will determine how well goes the session.

Photos Reverse Side

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The special session

Milton Klein, seated, director of the Department of Health and Welfare, explains health and welfare funding at a pre-legislative workshop in Idaho Falls this week. Standing from left are Reps. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the House Health and Welfare Committee; and John O.Sessions, R-Driggs, chairman of the House Transportation Committee; and Dean Tisdale, chief of the Department of Transportation planning division. Welfare and highway funding are expected to be the top appropriation items at the special session scheduled to convene Monday morning.

Gubernatorial viewpoint

Idaho Gov. John V. Evans indicated he would call a special session of the Idaho Legislature May 12 and listed accomplishments and failures of the Legislature.