Democrats to blame for special session

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It's ironic, but if Gov. John V. Evans calls a special legislative session as now appears probable, it is his own party which is mainly responsible.

It's true the Senate Republican leaders are blamed for the fiasco in delaying adjournment four days in the 1980 session which cost the taxpayers an extra $56,000. By forcing them to return, the Senate did concur in implementing the One Percent Tax Initiative and this may well have been worth the price.

It still doesn't excuse Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, and Majority Leader James Risch for blatant irresponsible action. It's also no credit to the other Senate Republicans for allowing these shenanigans. Only Sen. Reese E. Verner, R-Nampa, who voted against early adjournment until browbeaten by some of his fellow Republicans can hold his head high.

Also not a factor although many believe it was petty, the Republican legislators failed to approve funding for the governor's staff, an unprecedented action. In retaliation, the governor vetoed appropriattions for 47 members of the Legislative Fiscal Office, Legislative Auditor and Legislative Data Center.

However, the governor and the legislative leaders believe these can be funded without little if any loss in personnel for the remainder of the year. This could be done by the governor drawing on contingency and other funds at his disposal and the legislators can siphon from the regular $1.4 million yearly appropriation to the Legislature.

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The Medicaid crisis came about when District Judge Robert Newhouse ruled a couple of weeks ago the state must adhere to the letter of the law which requires that the state must pay the "full reasonable cost" of nursing home care not paid by the federal government.

Milton Klein, Department of Health and Welfare, director, estimates the Medicaid program will wind up the current fiscal year in June about $4 million in debt. He also said there will be about a $6 million shortfall in fiscal 1981.

The bill to delete this provision was first defeated in the House, mostly because the Democrat minority joined with the Republican moderates in wanting those increased funds, explained Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the House Health and Welfare Committee.

She said a similar bill passed the Senate but the same Democrat-Moderate Republican House combination sent the bill to her committee near the end of the session. She said a motion to vote it out was defeated by a margin in voice vote of about 10 to 1.

Mrs. Kearnes said she and other legislators feared there would not be money enough to pay the costs.

The Democrats rightfully wanted the increased fund for these Medicaid patients. The leaders in this were Reps. Dorothy Reynolds, D-Caldwell, and Steven F. Scanlin, D-Caldwell, but most Democrats went along.

The hospitals, senior citizens and nursing homes also lobbied against the bill.

"What we were afraid would happen did happen and even now with a special session of the Legislature I don't know where we are going to get $4 million," said Mrs. Kearnes.

Thus the Democrats who wanted the increased Medicaid funding unwittingly brought about the present situation. They wanted the full loaf, could have settled for half, and now got nothing.

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Another prime topic in the special session is increased funding for highway maintenance and improvements.

After bills calling for a 2 cent per gallon increase and a truck ton mile hike hurdled the House, the Democratic minority leader, Cy Chase, D-St. Maries, opposed the ton truck measure. It was beaten 19-16, with the help of some Democrats.

The Senate leadership then decided that if the truckers were not required to pay their fair share, they shouldn't ask car owners to foot a tax increase and buried it in committee.

Thus, Chase and some of the Democrats can be held responsible for not getting the increases which would have raised about $13 million for highway maintenance and improvements. This was about a third of the $39 million requested by the governor and the Department of Transportation.

The caravan tax and trip permit did raise about $3 million for highways that will help.

But, in short, the governor must whip his own Democrats in line if there is a special session.