Legislative Limelights ...

Special session may get down to business

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The gathering of the 105 men and women who make up the Idaho Legislature for a special session May 12 will give Democratic Gov. John V.Evans and the Republican controlled Legislature an opportunity to transact some state business devoid of political rhetoric.

In their regular session, the Senate Republicans, and particularly the leadership didn't exactly cover themsleves with glory by their irresponsible early adjournment. They had to come back four days later and finish the job—and they did this admirably.

However, both the governor and most of the legislators really desire to help the state and they can be expected to do at least a satisfactory job. Being political animals, they are expected to mix some politics. In this, the governor holds the upper hand because what happens will likely be forgotten by the time his term expires in two years. This is not the case for legislators, who face re-election this year unless they decide not to run. Only about a half dozen had announced their decision to voluntarily give up their seats. The only one from East Idaho is Rep. Doyle C. Miner, R-St.Anthony, chairman of the powerful House Appropriation Committee.

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The governor has specified three major items to consider but there are a number of others he plans to add. The main proposals include a $500,000 supplemental appropriation for some 20,000 dependent mothers and children to match $1.5 million in federal funds, repeal a section of law which says the state must pay all "full reasonable" costs of Medicaid patients in nursing homes; and a 2 cents per gallon state tax increase and truck ton mileage fee hike that will raise $13 million to maintain and improve state highways.

The governor told this writer there will be other items included. The main one, which the governor secretly wants the opportunity to approve, is funding for the legislative staff made up of personnel of the Legislative Fiscal Office, Auditor and Data Center. He vetoed these appropriations in anger on the last day of the session in retaliation for the legislators refusing to provide funding for seven members of his budget and planning staff. It's likely a move he would like to rectify.

Other minor matters money for salaries and expenses for four narcotics agents and perhaps others that develop during the session. He has the constitutional authority to add any items he wants. A significant gesture is his decision not to ask for more funding for the Office of Energy —a hot potato. It shows he wants to be conciliatory and not stir up another political battle that marked the closing days of the regular session.

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Now that the primary antagonists—governor and the Senate Republican leadership have had a chance to cool their tempers—the coming session should immediately get down to business and go home, hopefully in two or three days. Senate President Po Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, must forget his personal animosity and resume a dialogue with the governor. In the last session, Budge refused to talk to the governor, even though he was repeatedly invited, even to the point of the governor writing him a special letter of invitation.

Budge faces what observers say may be a tough re-election campaign in his own district. There are a number of Democrats, including the governor, who might want to invade the district to help bring about Budge's defeat. However, they had better tread softly because past records show that voters resent blatant outside interference, whether it be in the state, legislative districts, county or even precincts.

It was observed earlier that Democrats were largely to blame for the special session. The House Democrats were the leaders in burying a bill in the House Health and Welfare Committee that would have removed the offending "full and reasonable cost" phrasings, while the Senate minority leader, Cy C. Chase, D-St. Maries, was the leader who defeated the highway tax and fee increase measures. Thus, it's up to the governor to whip some of his own party faithfuls into line.

There have been 18 special sessions called since Idaho assumed statehood in 1890, but all immediately followed the regular sessions with four exceptions. These included two special sessions for seven days in July, 1935, another for two days for reapportionment in August, 1961, and also for reapportionment for four days in July ,1964, after the court ruled the first reportionment was not satisfactory.