House majority leader sees tight session

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House Majority Leader Walter E. Little, R-New Plymouth, one of the more personable members of the Idaho Legislature, sees nothing but blood and toil for the 46th Idaho Legislature to convene for its first half regular session Jan. 12.

Little, by nature, is a happy-go-lucky individual but one thing that has eluded him for years is the speakership and it has indeed been frustrating.

He was the decided favorite to win it in 1978 but a comparative unknown by the name of Rep. Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, came out of nowhere and walked away with the top prize after a bitter fight, by a couple of votes.

He has been a candidate at various times but has had to settle for the number two spot as House majority leader which is by no means a minor honor.

This year, he was lucky to hang on to this, barely retaining the post by turning back the assistant majority leader, Rep. Jack Kennevick, R-Boise, by two votes, 29-27. Kennevick had Olmstead's open backing which means relations between Olmstead and Little won't exactly be of the most cordial sort. But then, they weren't exactly brothers in arms in the last biennium.

Little is a rancher and has served eight terms, which places him near the top in seniority. Besides his weighty majority role, he also serves on State Affairs and Ways and Means committees.

Little, in answering a Post-Register questionnaire, leaves no doubt the Legislature should do only what is necessary and get out in the quickest possible time in view of the stringent financial conditions.

Little has harbored gubernatorial aspirations but there hasn't been an enthusiastic clamor for his candidacy and time is running short.

Regarding the 1 Percent Initiative, he says to put new property above the freeze but to maintain the freeze, and he is definitely against any tax increase and tax relief with the downturn in the economy.

Little favors listing priorities on the available dollars but to see what the general fund offers before able to set a figure on the general fund budget.

He expresses opposition to any state gas tax increase, fish and game fee hikes or expanded programs, and giving cities more home rule but would change his mind if people in his district wanted it.

He said he is against student fees or other increase and to give higher education what is possible but to leave it up to the State Board of Education to use it as it sees fit.

Skipping along, he wants no changes in the school formula and he doesn't see how state funding for public schools can be hiked. He also is against forced school district consolidation.

He does favor limited degree of public employee salary increase if the funds are available.

He opposes a Department of Energy and points out he sponsored legislation in the last session to combine health districts with the Department of Health and Welfare that could save $600,000 per year.

He favors the Sagebrush Rebellion and the Right to Work Law, but opposes any more licensing for day care centers, shelter homes, and other such institution.

He also favors changing the primary back to August, which also means elimination of the presidential primary.

Majority Leader Walter E. Little