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The political pulse

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Legislative limelights...

Legislature has ideal chances for progress

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The first regular session of the 46th Idaho Legislature has an excellent chance to plow new ground and enact significant and progressive legislation but it likely won't.

Next year is devoid of elections so what it does will not be subject to wrath of those highly vocal voters, who seemingly have great influence with legislators.

Gov. John V. Evans and the state elective officials and the 105 legislators will not face election for nearly two years, easing them from political pressures. In the past, it has been the sessions on off-election years that have enacted the most worthy legislation.

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The primary reasons the Idaho Legislature will do nothing spectacular are twofold: (1) the lack of money, and (2) the election results which indicated voters want a staunch do-nothing approach.

Many of the more capable lawmakers were wiped out in the strong Republican deluge. In East Idaho, these included two Democrats, Sen. Richard A. Egbert, Teton, dean of the Legislature with 30 years service whose effectiveness for getting needed appropriations is well known; and Rep. Wendell Miller, D-Idaho Falls, highly respected by his colleagues and a champion of nuclear power.

It's remarkable that many legislators who most political observers and colleagues consider the least capable were easily re-elected, mostly because they carried the popular Republican label, didn't do much and thus were not controversial.

The defeat of such outstanding Democrats as Sens. Art Manley, Coeur d'Alene; and Kenneth Robinson, Boise; and Reps. Steven Scanlin and Dorothy Reynolds, Caldwell; and L.C. Spurgeon, Coeur d'Alene, was a loss to the state.

Many other legislators, mostly in disgust, decided not to seek re-election. These included Sens. Richard High, R-Twin Falls; Cy C. Chase, D-St. Marie, Senate minority leader; John Bell, R-Rupert; and Lester Hartvigsen, D-Malad; and Reps. Herbert Fitz, R-New Meadow; Gary Ingram, R-Coeur d'Alene; and Ronald Harlow, D-Lewiston.

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After viewing the Legislature in action more than 30 years, there has been one outstanding quality — the vast majority of the senators and representatives sincerely seek to do what they feel is in the best interest of the state, regardless of partisanship.

There are a few malingerers and a few who place party politics above state interest but fortunately they are in the minority. Most are hard-working, dedicated men and women, even if their philosophy is to preserve the status-quo at all costs.

Although one may disagree with their political philosophy in many cases, the East Idaho contingent generally ranks among the most diligent. Many may lack ability and leadership but they try.

Among those veterans from East Idaho who must rank in the upper crust are Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot; and Reps. Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot; Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls; Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls; John O. Sessions, R-Driggs; and Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, but most of the others do well in some sectors.