

Cities expect little aid from Legislature

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The Association of Idaho Cities has outlined an ambitious program for the upcoming 1980 Idaho Legislature — known officially as the Second Regular Session of the 45th Idaho Legislature — but privately the leaders are less than confident they will experience glowing success.

George Wehmann, the energetic Ammon mayor and president of the association, said the association may get nothing, although he and others hope for some gains.

In their recent regional meeting here, the city officials adopted a program which appears of modest proportion.

It is dominated by backing for the 1 percent property tax freeze but wanting provisions to increase property tax collections in proportion to growth and inflation.

The AIC, says Martin Peterson, the association's executive director, won't support any specific 1 percent legislation, preferring to leave this to legislative committees.

Other major programs the AIC supports are giving a substantial slice of state revenues to local government; and local option taxation on such items as wine or liquor-by-the drink, transient recreational vehicles staying at campgrounds and trailer parks; and eliminating the population restrictions on the motel-hotel tax for tourist cities. The present law permits this for cities in counties under 20,000 population which derive the most economic impact from the tourist industry, such as McCall, Sun Valley and Ketchum.

The AIC supports lifting interest rates on tax anticipation notes and warrants; counting the mayor as part of a quorum at city council sessions, and authorization of transit system general obligation bonds.

Other minor legislation backed includes redefining highways to include city streets; using State Water Pollution Control Fund money for training sewage treatment plant operators; combining state and federal funding for innovative sewage treatment projects; and to allow cities to charge for building permit fees under the 1973 Uniform Building Code.

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A year ago when questionnaires were sent to East Idaho legislators on their reaction to city proposals most responded favorably.

They likely were sincere, but when they got to the Legislature, city legislation was virtually ignored on grounds the Percent Tax Initiative called for austere financing on all levels of government.

At that time, Peterson remarked he was engaged in what he called "a holding action," preventing loss of some of the cities' gains.

Gov. John V. Evans expressed anger the Legislature did nothing for cities and even threatened to call a summer special session.

Peterson's predecessor, Floyd Decker, resigned in the summer of 1978, explaining he had become frustrated with efforts to coordinate city and state efforts.

The city association has joined its county counterpart, the Association of County Commissioners, on some joint legislative efforts that have brought partial success. However, the two associations are often at loggerheads, particularly in splitting state revenue and local jurisdiction.

Their cooperation for the most part has fallen far short of spectacular results.

It's been mystifying why legislators are prone to oppose the cities, because generally they, as well as the counties and schools, do a better job running their governments, in spite of more stringent financing.



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Senate chairman

BOISE — Sen. Edith Miller Klein, R-Boise, is the chairman of the State Local Government and Taxation Committee which will have a major voice in drafting city-oriented legislation.