

Legislative limelights . . .

# Party lines splinter at Idaho Legislature

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

Except for the leadership, this second half of the Idaho Legislature's 45th session appears more concerned with enacting legislation that will benefit the state, rather than acting along partisan lines.

Three votes on major pieces of legislation recently illustrated that the 105 lawmakers don't concern themselves with their party label, but rather on the merits of the issues.

In this session, much as in the past, more moderate Republicans have joined the small but tight band of Democrats in the lower chamber on certain pieces of legislation that were not enthusiastically supported by the leadership. This is still somewhat true, but the dividing lines have become even more blurred.

Over in the Senate, the division is less sharp. Both Republicans and Democrats don't hesitate to cross party lines, to the displeasure of their leaders.

On strictly partisan issues — and they don't appear to be many in this session — The legislators may follow party lines. But, it takes considerable arm twisting on some recalcitrant members in some cases, and sometimes this doesn't work.

\*\*\*

Reflecting this situation were votes on the certificate of need and so-called Sagebrush Rebellion the past week and the Idaho Housing Agency bond limit increase bill earlier. All three proposals are among the most important and meaningful in this session.

The mild surprise was the passage Wednesday by a wide margin of 46-24 on the certificate of need, which have been a bitter issue in the last three years.

In this lineup, the solid band of 19 Democrats joined with 27 Republicans to vote for the measure, while 24 of the more conservative Republicans cast negative ballots.

## The Post-Register

### The political pulse

C-2

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Thursday, Feb. 28, 1980

In this lineup, two East Idaho Republicans, Elaine Kearnes, Idaho Falls, and surprisingly Wayne Tibbitts, Lorenzo, lined up on the winning side. They felt the senior citizens needed this bill and it had nothing to do with politics or philosophy.

Conversely, the Sagebrush Rebellion bill, which provided for Idaho to claim about 12 million acres of Bureau of Land Management land, brought a party split.

There wasn't much question of the measure hurdling the House 51-19 Wednesday but three of the more conservative Democrats, Melvin Hammond, Rexburg; Harold Reid, Craigmont; and Carl P. Braun, Orofino, voted with the

majority. Two moderate Republicans, Peggy Bunting, Boise, and Percival A. Weshche, Nampa, joined 17 Democrats on the losing side.

Earlier, a band of the more progressive Republicans joined the Democrats to pass a bill 42-28 for the Idaho Housing Agency to allow another \$200 million in bonds for low-interest housing. It's significant that a conservative Republican, Darwin L. Young, R-Blackfoot, led the winners.

All of these bills have a certain partisan flavor, but they go much deeper than that. That's the reason lawmakers ignore party lines.

\*\*\*

These measures are now up for consideration in the more methodical Senate where party lines also are often forgotten.

The situation in the Senate is vastly different because the Republicans hold only a narrow 19-16 margin while in the House the Republicans boast a 50-20

difference. This House Republican topheavy majority, however, can be a disadvantage as it causes fragmentations that enable the more moderates to join the willing Democrats on certain pieces of legislation.

Most feel there is a tight band of 16 to 20 right wing Republicans but even many of these do not hold together on many issues. This also applies to the moderate Republicans and the Democrats as reflected in the past three ballottings.

Over in the Senate there are four or five Republicans and three or four Democrats who often cross party lines.

The more moderate Republicans are Sens. Richard High, Twin Falls, John Barker, Buhl; Larry Craig, Midvale; Verner Reese, Nampa, and Edith Klein, Boise. The more conservative Democrats are Richard A. Egbert, Teton; John Bell, Rupert; Israel Merrill, Blackfoot, and Lester Hartvigsen, Malad.