The 1981 Idaho Legislature...

Solons emphasize strong conservative views

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(Editor's note: This is the 16th and final of a series of articles giving the views of East Idaho legislators and the leadership on the salient issues shaping up for the coming session. This one is a summary on their views.)

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A strong conservative trend was reflected by the East Idaho legislators and the leadership in responding to a Post-Register questionnaire on what appears the main issues for the 46th Idaho Legislature which opened this week.

What the lawmakers say in responding to such a questionnaire and what they do is some times not the same because conditions change, which often influences them to reverse their position. However, for the most part, it gives an accurate reflection of their thinking on the key issues that likely will be considered in the coming session.

Lobbying is expected to be intensified over the shrinking budget and this often has a definite bearing on how the legislators in all their wisdom will vote.

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It's readily apparent, however, that on the all important financial question, all of the legislators are committed to hewing a tight financial line. It's their collective view that every program must justify its appropriation.

The governor has predicted a revenue of $438 million but the Legislative Revenue Projection Committee has indicated it may not reach this figure. If this is the case, then the financial squeeze will become tighter.

The budget recommendations of Gov. John V. Evans for $452 million is not all that tight. This is a 19 percent increase from the $380 million actually to be spent for the current fiscal year, after the 3.85 percent holdback and other reductions are figured.

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The legislators appear firm against any general tax increase and they also are reluctant to do much changing for the 1 Percent Tax Initiative, perhaps the single most important issue.

Their responses indicate backing for tax relief for the elderly, including continuance and pehaps liberalizaton of the senior citizen circuit breaker and re-enacting the Homeowners Exemption Act that gave the property owners a 20 percent tax cut.

They indicate the budget may be trimmed from $452 million, especially if the revenue fails to reach anticpation amount as appears the case at present.

One exception in a tax hike is support for a state gasoline tax increase and some form of vehicle fee increase, including truckers, but this mainly affects the drivers who use the highways.

They also appear to approve a college student fee hike and consolidation of Lewis-Clark State College with the University of Idaho, or designating it a vocational technical school; favor 70 percent or more support from the general fund budget for public education as a means to reduce the local property tax; and agree on slight salary increases for public employees and teachers.

For the most part they generally support the governor's recommendation for 6.5 percent salary hike for state public employes and 7.5 percent for teachers.

They appear flatly opposed to a Department of Energy, and the governor has not included this in his recommendation; cast a dim view for city local option, particularly for taxing powers; show reluctances for any sizeable increased funding for the Fish and Game Department; and don't want any more regulations for day care centers, shelter homes or other institutions.

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On what looks like emotional issues, they heavily favor the Sagebrush Rebellion that would shift contol of public lands from federal to state; strongly back Right to Work law; and oppose compulsory arbitration, particularly for public employees and school boards.

They also appear ready to abolish the May presidential preference primary and move the regular primary back to August.

Also appearing possible is a Republican move to require 20 or 25 percent endorsement by party convention delegates for gubernatorial and congressional candidates

This is an off election year when the Legislature usually does it best work but in view of the skimpy financial outlook and the heavy Republican conservative majority, it does not appear there will be any spectacular development to take place in the 46th session.

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