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Legislative limelights...

Legislature may cut many Evans' programs

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There's an old saying around the Idaho Capital that the governor proposes and the Legislature disposes.

In recent years, the Republican-controlled Legislature has been inclined to toss many of Democratic Gov. John V. Evans' programs in the wastebasket and this year likely will be no different.

The governor in his State of the State message Monday outlined what appears a sensible program but by the time the lawmakers get done, it will be unrecognizable, if past legislative records are a criterion.

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It's unfortunate but it appears that the budget and State of State goals the governor recommends appear to be targets among much of the legislative leadership.

It was rather odd, but the governor was more explicit on some funding in the State of the State message than he was in the generalities he expounded in his budget talk a week earlier.

As expected, the State of the State message drew mixed reaction among the legislators, with the governor's tax recommendations drawing most of the fire. His proposal for paying quarterly estimates on income tax payments rather than annual was especially criticized.

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The governor had a number of excellent suggestions that should be considered, and it showed, if nothing else, leadership on his part.

Among these are continuing strong support of public education and academic and vocational education beyond high school; and urging the State Board of Education to explore the system of avoiding duplications.

He urged restoring of three narcotics investigators to help control drug abuse; hiring additional staff to provide protection to prison employees, and establishment of additional community work release centers to stabilize the prison population to a manageable level.

He also noted the Prison Task Force Citizens Committee made a number of excellent recommendations following last summer's prison riot. Among these was an ombudsman office outside the Department of Correction to hear public concerns, counseling intern program, that prison rioting be made a felony, and the Board of Correction be abolished under a constitutional amendment.

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The governor also expressed concern on hazardous and radioactive wastes which hit close to East Idaho's National Engineering Laboratory.

He said the state has entered into an agreement with the EPA to assure that those chemicals are disposed of or stored in safe manner.

On low-level radioactive wastes, he said Congress has given the states responsibility for the safe management of such type of waste sites. He

said the state is now negotiating with other states in the Pacific Northwest on handling such wastes on a regional basis through interstate compacts.

He also proposed the state's 25 percent share for the St. Helens volcano ash cleanup should be paid with funds from the Water Pollution Control Fund.

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More supplemental funding for Aid to Dependent Children (the maximum for two children and mother drops to \$281 in March) was urged by Evans, along with a job incentive program for working mothers.

He also said efforts will continue to eliminate fraud and abuse in the welfare system; asking for almost \$500,000 in projects to help the handicapped; and an appropriation to begin an in-home service to delay as long as possible the time when an elderly person must enter a nursing home.

He then mentioned the 6.5 percent across-the-board increase and 1 percent meritorious increases for the state employees.

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The governor outlined steps for what he said were maximizing revenues.

These include a users fee for state service, the quarterly income tax payments, which would raise a one-time gain of about \$24 million for the fiscal year and also an annual gain of \$4.2 million; and borrowing surplus funds from the \$23 million State Water Pollution Control Account.

Finally, the governor did propose a severance tax on non-renewable resources, such as mining minerals, and this drew a fairly favorable reaction. The state should be compensated for loss of these resources, however. Other bordering states have already opposed the tax.

He also called for an end to the inheritance tax which he says is unfair, and for law to permit industrial revenue bonds.

He said the Department of Transportation needs an additional \$16 million to improve and maintain highways through highway user fees. He said a tougher weight enforcement law will be asked.

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On energy, he encouraged conservation, utilizing renewable resources and developing thermal plants.

He noted the Northwest Power Bill will assure future energy supplies in the Pacific Northwest at a reasonable cost, permitting the BPA to buy new power to meet the region's energy needs, and provide the state government and the public an opportunity to participate in making the basic decisions about electricity production and consumption.

He asked full implementation of the 1 percent tax initiative but gave no specifics how it should be done, and asked to enlarge the homeowners exemption to 30 percent, or \$15,000 from the present 20 percent or \$10,000, which is less, for the coming year.