

Sen. Ricks expects shorter session

By BEN J. PLASTINO

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Senate Majority Leader Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, who heads the 21-member eastern Idaho legislative delegation in Boise, said he is anxious to shorten hearings and enable the 48th Idaho Legislature to adjourn in 60 days.

This compares with 83 days last year, the fourth longest session on record, an average of more than 70 days in recent years, and a record 95 days in 1983.



Mark G. Ricks

Ricks, who is serving his fourth two-year term, said the Revenue Projection Committee got off to an early start last week. On Wednesday, it released an estimated fiscal 1986 general revenue figure of \$575.2 million, \$2 million less than Gov. John Evans' forecast.

"We've already planned to shorten our budget hearings to Jan. 23, about a week earlier than the Feb. 1 date of the past," Ricks said in a Post-Register interview.

He also said the Joint Finance-Appropriation Committee, of which he is a member, hopes to deliberate later this month on recommendations from the Legislative Public Employee Committee on pay

increases for state employees. Ricks said he found no fault with the Evans' recommendation to grant a 3 percent pay increase. This is in addition to built-in fringe benefits.

"I think the Legislature will just about arrive at those increases," he said.

He also said he found little fault with Evans' \$599,999,000 budget recommendation for the fiscal year beginning July 1.

Ricks said he had talked with Sen. Walter Yarbrough, R-Grand View, who agreed the Legislature can approve a budget near the governor's figure and go home.

Ricks said the quarterly income tax collection recommended by the governor will be a "stumbling block," adding "I don't think the Republican legislators will buy it."

Ricks also questioned Evans' recommendation to raise \$40 million through quarterly collection with \$20 million to be spent this year and \$20 million next year.

Ricks said the governor did not include funding for a teacher career-ladder program.

He predicted the Legislature may provide more money for public education than the governor recommended, but added the amount proposed for higher education may be trimmed.

Ricks said Evans recommended \$306 million for public education from the state general fund, but from

all state sources it would rise to \$338 million.

"We may have money available for career ladder," he said. "Some school districts are ready for career-leader programs but some are not."

Ricks said the Republicans have the votes to enact a right-to-work bill and repeal the so-called Little Davis-Bacon Act, which uses a federal formula to set wage levels on all public construction projects.

"We have four right-to-work bills and I believe we will come to a consensus to pass one that is reasonable," he said.

Besides the budget, Ricks said an important proposal to consider is one that would require the germane committees to approve gubernatorial appointments, rather than just the Senate State Affairs Committee.

For example, the Senate Health and Welfare Committee would confirm appointment for a director of the Department of Health and Welfare.

Other laws he considers important would:

- raise the drinking age to 21 years;
- approve water right adjudication;
- sanction agreement of the Swan Falls water rights contract between the state and Idaho Power Co.;
- increase judges' salaries;
- regulate hazardous waste; and
- provide additional funding for the Idaho Prison guard program.

Ricks said he is playing a key role in appointment of committees.

He noted a third of the legislators

are newcomers, including 14 of 42 senators.

Ricks said he is helping conduct seminars to assist the new legislators in becoming acquainted with duties of the Legislature.

"The Senate leaders are also meeting regularly to keep the ball rolling," he said.

The eastern Idaho delegation will have a powerful voice in the current session. Besides Ricks, those in leadership include Sen. Vearl C. Crystal, R-Rigby, as Senate assistant majority leader; and Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, as House majority caucus chairman.

Committee chairmen include Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, Senate Local Government and Taxation Committee, and Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, House Transportation and Defense Committee. The number of chairmen is down from the record six of four years ago.

On the powerful JFAC besides Ricks and Crystal are Watkins; Rep. Ray Infanger, R-Salmon; and three new members, Reps. Raymond Parks, R-Blackfoot; Preston Brimhall, R-Idaho Falls; and J. F. Chadband, R-Idaho Falls.

By virtue of their leadership, Ricks, Crystal and Bateman are members of the influential State Affairs Committee of their respective chambers.

Ricks and the eastern Idaho legislators said they all expect a strong conservative influence over the session.