The Post-Register
The political pulse
Idaho Falls, Idaho, Sunday, January 11, 1981 C-11

Legislative limelights...

Evans budget attracts Legislators approval

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

Gov. John V. Evans' 1982 fiscal year budget recommendations appeared to have attracted general approval among the legislators which indicates less troubles in this session than has occurred in the rocky ones in the past.

That's not to say it will be sweetness and light. It never has been between a governor and Legislature, no matter what party has control. But it still may be more harmonious when they are gnawing on just the bones and not the meat on finances.

The Democratic governor and the Republican controlled Legislature realize they are in the same tight financial squeeze and striving for the same goals.

* * *

The $452 million general fund figure is a rather hefty one and as House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, observed, a 19 percent jump over last year's financial outlay. The 1981 fiscal year budget was set at $406 million, but due to the 3.85 percent holdback and other cuts, the 1981 fiscal revenue actually was whittled to near $380 million.

Aside from protests of the teachers and public employees, which is understandable, his recommendations for only a 6.5 percent increase for the public employees and 7.5 percent for teachers appear to meet approval of most of the lawmakers and most taxpayers.

The Idaho Legislature, although often maligned, has usually given education, particularly public education, as much as the governor recommended, and in most cases, even more.

On the other hand, it has been the governor who has been the staunch champion for public employee salary hikes, often against the wishes of the legislative leadership. This condition has existed during the Democratic reigns of both Evans and Gov. Cecil D. Andrus before him.

* * *

The governor extended a conciliatory message by not recommending, for example, creation of a full-fledged Department of Energy, which sparked a bitter floor fight in the last session. He also supported the 3.85 percent holdback exemption for the Legislative budget.

He still recommended, however, abolishment of the State Meat Inspection Bureau and turning it over to the federal inspectors at a savings of $500,000. This was rejected by the Legislature last year but the more stringent financial picture may influence the lawmakers to reverse themselves in the coming session.

Other programs also slated for the axe are driver improvement counseling, WICHE, placement of medical students with the University of Utah, family practice residency, reduction in building inspections due to a slowdown in construction, vocational rehabilitation, and cuts in the Department of Health and Welfare administration staff at the central office at Boise.

* * *

This is not an election year and both the governor and Legislature can function without the political pressures often associated at a time they may be seeking re-election. Records show that it is in the off-election years when the Legislature turns in its best performances.

About the only criticism was the doubts expressed by the lawmakers that the $452 million general fund revenue is too high. Most are content to wait for their own Legislative Revenue Projection figures later in the month but in the past these have been close to those of the governor.

However, there are other issues, which could provoke partisan and factional fights, not only between the Republicans and Democrats, but among the moderates, conservatives and the right wingers in the House; and also betweens the two chambers.

The Right to Work; further 1 percent implementation; scope of tax relief; increased highway funding, particulary hike in the state gas tax and truck fees; disposition of Lewis-Clark College; more city home rule and local tax option; Sagebrush Rebellion; funding for the Fish and Game Department; day care and shelter home licensing, and election law and party convention system changes are all highly volatile subjects, not necessarly of partisan nature.

Perhaps the dominant financial legislation may be turn out to be fairly calm, but look out for fireworks on issues of less important but of emotional nature.