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The political pulse

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Legislative limelights . . .

Idaho's Legislature wins hearty praises

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BOISE — The 1982 Idaho Legislature generally earned accolades of achievement for its performance the past 73-day session, despite admitted tight financing.

Gov. John V. Evans gave what he consider a high passing mark for what he said was following most of his major recommendations, particularly accepting his plans to stimulate the state's sluggish economy.

The turnabout was a welcome development when most legislators and leaders first expected this to be a Legislature that would barely keep the state government in operation.

Almost in a single voice, legislators, both Republicans and Democrats, considered it a good session, and perhaps even excellent, in the way it handled itself with the money available.

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The highlights are approving a \$463,625,300 general fund budget for fiscal 1983, a creditable 9.9 percent increase over the \$422,042,300 allocated for the current fiscal year. In this, public education got the largest increase in major funding at 10.3 percent, or \$215 million, compared with \$195 million this year, while higher education also was handed \$73,577,000, a healthy jump of 9.6 percent over the \$67,138,000 for this year. The Department of Health and Welfare also was funded at about \$216.5 million, about a 10 percent hike. This agencies account for about 85 percent of the general fund budget.

The most significant development was the approval of this budget almost without controversy, a sharp contrast with most recent past years.

About the only hassle were on two comparatively minor but emotional items. One was for a three-station concept for public television and \$125,000 supplemental funding was approved for this for the remainder of this year, plus \$625,000 for fiscal 1983. The other was for the Division of Economic and Community Affairs to promote tourism and business development, which eventually got a compromise \$215,000 funding from the original \$415,000 the governor recommended. In addition, \$129,000 was approved for primarily administering the \$6 million federal community grant program.

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One of the key factors in alleviating much of the prior controversies swirling about the work of the Joint Finance-Appropriation Committee is a new computer system which spits out the so-called "blue motion forms" These forms contain essential financial figures for each department, division and bureau. It gave JFAC

members and others a quick look appraisal. JFAC members than broke up into subcommittees to meet separately with department administrators and analysts. This promoted warm relationship with the government executives who finally felt their views and interest were sincerely considered.

This situation is in contrast with recent years, particularly last year, when many felt the 12 JFAC conservative members ran rough-shot over the moderates and others, earning the uncomplimentary title of "dirty dozen."

After a slow and ragged start, the Legislature moved rapidly the latter part of the session. As a result, most legislators agreed there was warm feeling between the two parties and between the two chambers. Democrats, who are in abject minority, agreed they were treated fairly, and maybe even more, by the Republican leadership in both houses.

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The emphasis in this session was one to spur the lagging economy. Some of the important pieces of legislation along this line were industrial revenue bonds, investment credit and job credit measures that give tax credit for new business and jobs.

Reviving the Clean Air Bureau, soil scientist program and water management system which were lopped off last year were among the noteworthy gains. That was not so much because of the money they cost but mostly reflected the willingness of most legislators to help the state's environment.

Too much time was lost on legislative reapportionment because there wasn't a lawmaker and even the governor who felt the reapportionment proposals would change much along the lines of those approved in the July special session and early in this past session. This one issue became an unnecessary political football, mostly the fault of the Senate Democrats under Minority Leader Ron J. Twilegar, D-Boise.

In the final results this bill was approved by a topheavy 28-6 votes, a result that was generally expected.

The 73 days was slightly longer than most expected, and perhaps unnecessary. It compares with the 75 days, plus 14 days special session in 1981, 83 days and three days special session in 1980, and 78 days in 1979.

The Legislature really didn't leave many campaign issues to argue about except possibly for Right-to-Work and the Little Idaho Davis-Bacon Act which the governor vetoed. Political philosophies and personal popularity have always been a paramount issue in past campaigns and it will play the major role in the one just ahead.