

The Post-Register

The political pulse

Legislative limelights *San Mar 21, 1982*

Evans and Legislature got along fairly well

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
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BOISE — Although this is an election year, the relationship between Democratic Gov. John V. Evans and the Republican controlled Idaho Legislature was surprisingly good.

At least much of the sharp interchanges of the past were kept at low ebb and this helped in the functions of both the executive and legislative branches of governor to the benefit of the people of Idaho.

If there were any dramatic fights they were confined to the two Republican senators, Wilson Steen, Glenns Ferry, and Vern Brasse, Boise, who participated in some fisticuffs last week that recalled some of the more tempestuous political days of the past. The two engaged in a hot argument over what appears a rather comparative disagreement on parliamentary procedures. Brasse called Steen a profane name and Steen tossed a couple blows, one to Steen's jaw and one to his mouth.

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There were three areas of disagreement — as expected — right-to work, the so-called Idaho Little Davis-Bacon Act and reapportionment, all of which the governor vetoed.

Legislative reapportionment has little interest with the bulk of Idaho voters but the right-to-work and Idaho Davis-Bacon proposals likely will become major campaign issues.

House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, an announced Republican gubernatorial candidate, kept his vow of serving his legislative leadership free of partisanship to the point that he drew praises from House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg. Hammond noted Olmstead's fairness was appreciated by the minority Democrats who have only 14 House members, compared with 56 Republicans.

Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt, also an announced aspirant for governor, also presided over the

Senate without apparent bias but on frequent occasions did take partisan potshots at the governor.

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The governor generally approved the general fund budget for the first time since he took office in January, 1977, after Gov. Cecil D. Andrus left to become U.S. secretary of interior. This is especially in contrast with a year ago when the governor bitterly lambasted the Legislature in general and the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee in particular in slashing his budget recommendations and seeking to dismantle many of the state departments.

This year, though, the governor said he generally approved of the \$463,623,200 budget which he observed was not far from the \$467.8 million he approved.

The governor was especially pleased with the 5 percent public employee salary raise and restoration of the Clean Air Bureau he recommended.

He was miffed at scrapping the Division of Economic and Community Affairs which has been set up to promote not only tourism but business expansion. However, a compromise has been under discussion. The governor has offered a compromise of \$245,000, rather than the original \$415,000. JFAC did approved \$129,000 but this is to handle administration of more than \$6 million in federal community grants.

Perhaps the tight financing has drawn the governor and Legislature closer together to fight a common problem. Despite the outcries of belt tightening, the \$463,623,200 budget is a 9.9 percent hike from the \$422,042,500 of the current year. This is about as good as could be done, even during the most prosperous of times.

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Legislative limelights . . .

East Idaho legislators influential in session

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
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BOISE — The 18 legislators from the 10 east Idaho counties, most of whom have long service, were among the guiding forces in the 1981 Idaho Legislature.

There were only four comparative newcomers, Sen. William L. Floyd, R-Idaho Falls; Martin B. Trillhaase, R-Idaho Falls, and Rich E. Orme, R-St. Anthony, who are completing their first two-year term, and Cornell Thomas, R-Pingree, who was appointed in January to complete the term of Rep. Darwin L. Young, R-Blackfoot, appointed to the Idaho Tax Commission.

The dean is Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, who is finishing his ninth term and has the rare distinction of serving as both a Democrat and Republican and in both the Senate and House. He is fifth in seniority in the time served and at 79 years of age in May is the oldest but his physical and mental stamina rivals that of a person 15 years younger. He announced Monday he will not seek re-election.

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This session was generally conducted on a low key and gave few legislators an opportunity to star. Because of tight financing, they appropriated what was essential, and, of course, enacted few new programs that would incur expenses.

As had been foreseen at the start of the session, the conservative views of east Idahoans were generally followed, as opposed to the more moderate trends in Democratic north Idaho and Boise valley.

Yet, unlike most recent sessions, the party

and philosophical lines were blurred as the lawmakers for the most part voted on merit of measures.

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By virtue of holding chairmanships, four senators and three state representatives wielded powerful influence. They are Sens. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, Resources and Environment; Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, Local Government and Taxation; Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, Commerce and Labor; and Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, Agriculture Affairs; and Reps. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, Transportation; Elaine Kearnes, Health and Welfare, who also announced Monday she would step aside; and Kurt L. Johnson, Education.

Also in key positions are members of the Joint Finance-Appropriation Committee, Watkins, Ricks, Crystal and Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, and Rep. Ray E. Infanger, R-Salmon.

Only one east Idahoan holds a position in the leadership — Rep. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, the widely respected House minority leader.

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The legislative chairmen, party leader, and JFAC members must be viewed as the hardest working by nature of their position but most of them are kept busy on committee work and at the general sessions.

As observed previously, they can be criticized for their political views and actions but every one of them are dedicated and honest, serving their state to the best of their ability.

This past Legislature left few issues to haggle about and as a result most were not extensively debated.