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The political pulse

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Legislative limelights . . .

East Idaho legislators influential in session

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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.