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Legislative limelights

Legislature approved fewer bills in 1982

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As was suspected the 1982 Idaho Legislature handled and passed less bills than in the three preceding sessions.

It substantiates the views that Legislatures do not need to handle a record volume of business to establish a high mark — quality rather than quantity are the best guidelines.

The 1981 Legislature actually introduced more bills than any in the history of the Legislature but its accomplishments were rated by most observers as far from the best.

Gov. John V. Evans handed them a C plus and even the legislators themselves admitted is was far from brilliant, although the declining economy, gross errors in revenue projections and more strife than usual between the Senate and House and between the Senate Republican and Democratic leadership added to the sorry record.

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Mardee A. Wyman, director of the Legislative Data Center which handles the legislative productions, reported that 1,721 pieces of legislation were handled in the past session. This was well below the record 2,068 in 1981, and 2,016 in 1980.

It also compares with 1,648 in 1979; 1,704 in 1978; 1,622 in 1977; and 1,800 in 1976.

Introduced in both Houses, including resolutions and memorials, were 617 bills in 1982; 701 in 1981; 813 in 1980; 684 in 1979; 737 in both 1978 and 1977; and 833 in 1976.

Bills passed, most of which were signed by the governor, were identical at 381 for both 1982 and 1981, the record 410 in 1980; 338 in 1979; 387 in 1978; 340 in 1977; and 370 in 1976.

The governor vetoed 11 in 1982; 16 in 1981; one of which was overridden (the employee 5 percent salary raise); 10 in 1980; 13 in 1979; 12 in 1978; 14 in 1977; and only 3 in 1976.

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Most legislators thought they could finish in 60 days, or 62 at the most, but the prolonged legislative reapportionment delayed adjournment.

As a result, they struggled for 73 days, which still was below the 75 in 1981, third longest of 85 in 1980; and 78 in 1979. The session lasted 69 in 1978; 71 in 1977; and 75 in 1976.

These figures does indicate that any thoughts of a biennial session is a pipedream. The state's population at close to one million and an overall budget or more than $1 billion with a general fund budget nearing $500,000 would indicate the legislators must meet at least once a year.

Even in the four years before the Legislatures adopted annual sessions in 1969, there were special sessions on alternate years to handle the state's business.

What could be considered are biennial budget sessions but in recent years they have not got far. This would require one session handle strictly budget and other financial problems one year, with business other than financial the following year. A two-thirds vote would permit considering other matters at every session, however. It seems to be working well in Utah and a few other states which are larger than Idaho.

Considering the mood of the legislators who like the milder climate and relaxation in Boise during the winter months, it likely will never come to pass.