

Legislative limelights...

Harmony much better in Idaho Legislature

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BOISE — The most striking contrast at the start of this Legislature session from the one last year is the harmony existing in the State Senate.

This bodes well for this first regular session of because the spirit of cooperation among the Republicans and the Democrats should speed up the legislative process by avoiding unnecessary political hassle.

That is not to say it will be all sweetness and light, because there is certain to be some political bickering. But this should be minimized in the current session.

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The key that touched on the harmony strain was in the professional and objective way the Senate State Affairs Committee handled the election challenged to Sen. John Peavey, D-Carey.

Those who followed this controversy know that supporters of Republican Maurice Ellsworth, Hailey attorney, challenged Peavey because they said there were irregularities, which there were, but they were those of loose handling by the precinct election judges and clerk in Blaine County, not intentional. As was brought out in the committee deliberations, this sort of thing likely happens in most counties through oversight.

Investigations by the committee showed Peavey and his supporters were guilty of no willful wrongdoing. In fact, the probe showed that only one election ballot was under question and this would hardly affect the 54-vote margin of victory for Peavey.

The Republican majority under Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, and Majority Leader James Risch, R-Boise, moved, after a 30-minute discussion, for the committee to recommend dismissal of the election challenge. It was carried by an unanimous committee vote.

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The most significant development was in the manner Risch and the Senate Minority Leader, Ron J. Twilegar, D-Boise, handled the case. Rather than the fiery exchange most legislators and observers expected, the two attorneys showed a surprising amount of pleasant exchanges and discussions on the issues.

The only one who indicated some doubt was

Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, who suggested a motion for the committee to vote the matter to the Senate floor without recommendations. Risch quickly replied, however, that the committee had been given the responsibility of investigating the case and should make some recommendations.

As a result, the full Senate, by unanimous voice vote, followed the committee's recommendations with little debate two days later, or last Wednesday. Both Risch and Twilegar spoke on the matter, affirming that no intentional offense had taken place and expressing appreciation for the cooperation shown among members of both parties.

The only sour note was expressed by freshman Sen. John Auld, R-Boise, who sought to show there were voters whose registrations were under question, but his argument lacked facts. He tempered his remarks to the committee after he saw the senators, both Republicans and Democrats, were cool to his arguments.

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A year ago, the situation was the opposite when the Senate Republicans, on a strictly party vote 19-16, refused to confirm the controversial Robert Lenaghan to continue on the Idaho Public Utilities Commission.

At that time, Risch and Budge, on one hand, engaged in heated exchanges with the Senate minority leader, Cy Chase, D-St. Maries, and other Democrats. The Republican refusal was interpreted as a strictly partisan move as there was nothing to question the competency of Lenaghan, except that he is an outspoken official who often rankled the Republicans.

This vote, also coming early in the session, left such a bitter taste the Senate Republicans and Democrats were at each other's throats for the remainder of the session. The differences even spilled over to the House, although the two parties have traditionally got along better in the lower chamber, possibly because the Republicans have such an overwhelming margin. It is 56-14 this session and it was 50-20 last year.

From this observation it would appear that Chase was to a large degree responsible for the acrimonious atmosphere existing in the Senate last year and even in previous years when viewed with the more pleasant conditions at present.