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Legislative limelights...

46th Legislature treads softly on state tax issues

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BOISE — Viewing the 46th Idaho Legislature for the first month affirms the conclusion most Idaho Legislatures are taking a cautious approach on financial matters.

There are a number of general fund tax relief and tax increase proposals but it can be said now that except for those already on the books they aren't going to get any place.

Most of the legislators, and this certainly includes the influential leadership, feel the voters have sent them a message they want no further state governmental increases, only the bare essentials.

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It appears the consensus legislators will finance what is absolutely necessary, and no more. Most are concerned governmental agencies be not trimmed so drastically that they can't give essential service. But they have taken the stand there is nothing in any phases of state government that is holy.

It's a little frightening to view this mentality but hopefully the anticipated revenues will increase enough so that there will be no need for drastic cuts, especially in the field of both public and higher education and health and welfare. These sectors account for 85 percent of the budget and there is little that can be done on the remaining 15 percent allotted to other state agencies and programs.

The Senate on almost a straight party line vote, 25-10, finally approved a resolution setting the revenue projection at \$422,240 million Monday afternoon, well under the \$438 million estimated by the governor. Yet, the Democrats may turn out to be more accurate in insisting the revenues may reach \$431 million, the figure generally agreed to by university and corporate economists. This remains to be seen.

The main fights will center between the moderates, including Republicans and most Democrats, and right wingers, with the conservatives holding the balance of power. This indicates that most essential programs will be enacted.

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From this long distant East Idaho view it would appear at this time, the budget will be fixed at near the Legislative revenue projection of \$422.2 million, and not the \$438 million the governor has recommended; that there will be no general tax increase; that public education, including kindergartens, will be adequately funded; that the only tax relief is continuance of the senior citizen circuit breaker and the homestead exemption; the state public employees and teachers will get some salary increase; and some hike will be given for highway funding, either in state gas tax or some form of vehicle registration increase.

The view of Senate Majority Leader James Risch, R-Boise, that it may be much easier to settle a bare bone budget rather than engage in long-winded hassles over the surplus is likely accurate.

When the legislators know they have only so much money, they are willing to appropriate what is absolutely necessary and go home. Under this premise it would appear the lawmakers can go home in 60 days or shortly thereafter, much to the relief of the governor and the Idaho people.

The strategy now is to let the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee trim all budgets to come within the revenue projection kid \$422,240 million, that the full Senate and House will then serve as a rubber stamp with some few exceptions.

It would appear then there will be no significant progress in state government in this session; but neither should there be drastic cutbacks for essential services as so many people fear, particularly in education. This would happen if there should be an abolishment of kindergarten which appears now to be a target.