

Leadership lack causes Legislature to splutter

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BOISE — After observing the antics of this 45th Idaho Legislature it isn't difficult to decide there is a woeful lack of leadership at key posts.

The State Senate has degenerated to little more than partisan bickering on many issues while in the House the moderate Republicans are joining forces with the Democrats and against the far right on many proposals.

The House Democrats generally stay as a solid bloc for the simple reason there aren't enough of them to make much impact except coalitions with the splinter Republicans. That's the penalty the majority Republican Party pays when it has such an overwhelming margin of 50 to 20. The Senate is more evenly balanced at 19 Republicans and 16 Democrats.

It's obvious that the most painful loss is kicking the astute Senate President Pro Tem Philip E. Batt upstairs to lieutenant governor where he has little to do; and the absence of Sen. Richard S. High, R-Twin Falls, and Rep. Larry Jackson, R-Boise, as co-chairman of the all important Joint Finance Appropriation Committee.

High decided he didn't want to serve on the finance committee and was tragically rejected

as Senate president pro tem but took over as chairman of the comparatively unimportant Senate Judiciary Committee while Jackson fell by the wayside in his defeat for the gubernatorial nomination.

Batt, High and Jackson were extremely knowledgeable, proficient and masters in compromise. High and Batt are still around but they understandably avoid interference.

In their place are Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs; and Sen. David Little, R-Emmett, and Rep. Doyle C. Miner, R-St. Anthony, the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee co-chairman.

Another missing is House Speaker Allan F. Larsen, R-Blackfoot, who lost the gubernatorial election but the new House speaker, Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, has, if anything, proved even superior by his fair-mindedness handling of the task, said fellow legislators.

Little wasn't intensely interested in taking over the Senate Finance Committee chairmanship and his lack of interest is apparent. Little is one of the more capable senators and can do an excellent job as he gains the experience.

Miner has shown considerable frustration and his flippant

remark aimed at the moderate Republicans of his committee that they should be replaced is astonishing.

He referred mainly to Reps. Lawrence Knigge, R-Filer; Tom Boyd, R-Moscow; and Kitty Gurnsey, R-Boise, and to a less extent, Mack W. Neibaur, R-Paul. These legislators were elected in their own rights, appointed to committee by the House speaker and have no obligation to Miner.

Miner apologized for his intemperate remarks but the damage is done and it may solidify even more the coalition of moderate Republicans with the Democrats which could be an overall plus.

Miner complained that the committee has had no direction from the Legislature regarding state employee payline decrease. Only Tuesday he said that direction is forthcoming and that the 7 percent payline (average) increase is the route it will take. Of course, it will bump squarely with Democratic Gov. John V. Evans' views.

The anticipated worst has been realized in the Senate. Budge surprisingly has kept a low profile but the majority leader, Sen. James Risch, R-Boise, has assumed the role of the hatchet man in incessant hassles with the Senate minority leader, Sen. Cy Chase, D. St. Marie, who also is known as a rough and tumble fighter.

Risch's latest outburst Monday pretty well reflects his attitude. He said arrogantly the Republican leaders might try to adjourn the session before Evans has a chance to veto the appropriation measures.

He was quoted as saying "all we have to do is pass bills the last week of the session and put them down on the governor's desk. He can veto them and if he does, he kills the agency. That's pretty much what it comes down to."

Such irresponsible statements reflects an abysmal lack of leadership. He also seems to forget the governor can call them back into special session.

Chase, in his talk to the Idaho Democratic Central Committee, vowed to fight the Republican steamroller methods but this sort of talk won't help matters. It further strengthens the predictions the Senate is staging a three-ringed circus of considerable rhetorics and little accomplishments.

Hopefully, calmer heads will prevail to bring some semblance of order. Right now, most observers can't help but feel this Legislature's performance is the worst in many years, perhaps in its history.

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They're missed

SORELY MISSED at the Idaho Legislature this year are the two veteran co-chairmen of the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee, former Rep. Larry Jackson, R-Boise, and Sen. Richard S. High, R-Twin Falls. Jackson unsuccessfully sought the gubernatorial nomination last year and High chose not to head the committee after he was defeated in his bid to become the Senate president pro tem.