

Legislative limelights . . .

1980 Idaho Legislature failure

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What the 1980 Idaho Legislature failed to accomplish likely outweighs the positive side.

The legislators at the start needed only to implement the 1 Percent Tax Initiative, approve a general fund budget of about \$400 million, and handle a few other imperative matters and go home. This could easily have been done in the 60 constitutional days.

But what happened?

They took 85 days, the third longest in their history, merely to extend the 1 percent tax freeze, and then engaged in nasty political games that deprived appropriations for part of the governor's staff and the governor in turn as a retaliation vetoed funds for much of the legislative staff.

The Legislature, however, was prolific. It introduced the second largest numbers of bills in its history.

It placed in the hopper 714 bills and 99 resolutions and memorials for a total of 813, the second highest to the all time record of 833 in 1976. Of these, 410 bills were passed and 53 memorials and resolutions were approved, for a total of 463, said Dorothy Hanford, assistant administrator of the Legislative Data Center. This is a new

record, exceeding 1976 when 370 bills and 77 memorials or resolutions were sanctioned, a total of 744.

This means then that of the 813 pieces of legislation introduced, 350 failed approval and many of these were important to the state's welfare.

Perhaps the most significant in failure was not fully implementing the 1 Percent Tax Initiative but the legislators in all their self-professed wisdom admitted they couldn't come up with a solution that would satisfy the local units of government.

After the 85 days of wrangling, on the last day they finally decided to continue the tax freeze another year, allowing a 4 percent growth factor, but only if the governmental tax unit were below the 1 percent limit.

The irresponsible Senate Republicans weren't even going to do that and adjourned without House concurrence, finally forced to return three days later Monday to complete the job.

Another important legislation was the failure to fund highway improvements and the fault for this falls primarily on Sen. Cy C. Chase, D-St. Maries, the Senate minority leader, and some of the Democratic sena-

tors. Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, was the only East Idaho legislator to vote against the truck ton mile tax hike.

Chase succumbed to the truck lobby and led the attack against the gross ton-mile truck fee increase, bringing about its defeat. Other senators said that if the truckers did not pay for increases, then there should be no hike of 2 cents state tax for the automobile owners. As a result this gas tax increase bill was pigeonholed.

These senators rightfully felt the truckers have not paid their fair share and are mostly responsible for the wear and tear of Idaho highways. They have not had an increased tax in 23 years.

This vehicle increase package would have raised about \$13 million, a third of the \$39 million requested by the governor and the Department of Transportation. It will mean less maintenance and improvements the coming year. It must then be done later at far higher costs due to inflation on material.

The legislators also failed to adequately fund schools, although with a 10.7 percent increase they did better than most agencies.

They also badly underfunded the Office of Energy, and as

Gov. John V. Evans put it, created a "headless horseman" because it doesn't provide for any money for administrators.

There were many important pieces of legislation that failed to hurdle the Legislators.

Among the most important were:

—No local option tax for cities and counties to serve as an escape valve.

—No revenue bond authority for water districts which was not a tax and could have immensely furthered varied beneficial water development.

—Sunk the Tourism Commission, leaving no effective agency to promote tourism, the third largest industry in Idaho. This called for up to a 2 cent

es add up to lengthy list

motel-hotel tax, bringing in about \$1 million.

—Clobbered truck deregulation that would have helped the small truckers, also a victim to the powerful commercial truck lobby.

—**Woefully inadequate funding for aid-to-dependent children and many human service programs, such as mental health, alcohol rehabilitation, substance abuse, Child Development Centers and others.**

—Failed to appropriate \$1.5 million for a 1,248 acre farm for Palisades Dam site.

—A bill to reveal real estate market sale price that would greatly have helped county assessors in their appraisal activities.

—Combining the state data

processing and computer operations under one agency but State Auditor Joe Williams and the other state elective officers opposed this and brought its downfall.

—A bill to allow the federal government to administer the state tax. This could have saved the state \$3.4 million a year.

—A bill revamping the State Tax Commission to replace it with four commissioners and a single chief executive.

—A bill designed to promote new gasohol plants by granting them property tax breaks.

—A bill making three-year

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jail term mandatory for persons convicted a second or third time for possession of large amounts of marijuana.

—Two bills to lower the state

income tax.

The list is long but don't worry, most of them will be back next session, known loosely as "old dogs."



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The Senate culprits

BOISE — The two leaders held most responsible for the prolonged session and dismal record of the 1980 Idaho Legislators are

from left, Senate Majority Leader James Risch, R-Boise, and Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs.