

Legislature did more than earlier believed

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The Idaho Legislature in its first regular 45th session, transacted more business than believed it would do at the start, although it was slightly below the usual volume.

The report compiled by Mardee Wyman, administrator of the Legislative Data Center which handles the process of bills through its computers, compiled the figures following adjournment and the signing and vetoes by Gov. John V. Evans.

The session ran 78 days, third longest in its 89-year-old history but still below the 90 days or more many had expected and feared. These 78 days are below 89 in 1967 and the first one of 97 in 1890.

In 1967, however, when the sales tax, kindergarten and other weighty matters were considered, there were five days in the first special session and 12 in a second special session to augment the regular 89 days, giving the weary legislators a solid 106 days of legislative ordeal.

It was almost as bad in 1971 when the Legislature grappled with the touchy one of reapportionment following the 1970 census, and the now famous Supreme Court ruling of "one man, one vote." The legislators started with a 69-day regular session, then added 18 days of special session devoted entirely to reapportionment, or 87 continuous days.

But back to the business at hand and Mrs. Wyman finds that 599 different pieces of legislation were introduced, plus 85 resolutions and memorial, of which 338 were passed, 325 signed by the governor and 13 vetoed; and 46 resolutions and memorial approved.

This isn't far behind what is considered an average session in 1978 of 654 bills introduced, plus 83 resolutions and memorials, 387 passed, of which 373 were signed by the governor, and 23 vetoed, and 51 resolutions and memorials passed.

Many legislative leaders are fond of saying there are usually some 1,200 bills introduced in a session of which about half are enacted. The record furnished by Mrs. Wyman shows that it is a gross exaggeration.

The Post-Register

The political pulse

E-2 Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, April 18, 1979

Since 1969, she found the number of bills passed since 1969 ranged between 295 and 463, with the average just a little more than 400.

In the opinion of many, including this writer, the enactment of less bills can be a vast improvement, and this was the case in the last session.

Most legislators agreed that because of the 1 percent issue only the most essential legislation should be considered. As a result many old bills which make their appearance year after year, called "old dogs" were not introduced.

The 1 percent tax initiative, of course was the dominant one and all financial and budgetary legislation needed to wait until this was resolved.

There were a number of good pieces of legislation that were enacted besides the 1 percent, such as the \$40 million tax relief package and the \$327 million budget, which compared with the \$319 million budget of the current fiscal year.

Among the more important bills were those authorizing the state to install and market power from a 90 megawatt generator at Palisades Dam, authorizing counties, such as Madison, to establish a geothermal heating system; and raising the lid on interest rates for home mortgage loans from 10 to 13 percent in the usury law and freeing more home mortgage money.

Also enacted were bills combining Idaho's regular primary with the quadrennial presidential preference fourth Tuesday in May and thus eliminating the primary in the dull days of August; and raising the payline (average) salaries for state employees 7 percent but placing in-grade raises strictly on a merit basis.

There were others, such as effecting a compromise between Idaho timber industry and loggers that changes log measurement methods and likely terminates a century-old controversy; mandatory sentencing; appropriating at 6.2 percent increase for public

schools but somewhat less hike for higher and vocational education; authorizing a \$425,000 water resource study; and perhaps the greatest interest to most but questioned by many as to its benefits, eliminating the written driver's examinations.

Its accomplishments also can be measured by what it defeated, such as squashing repeal of the state Land-Use Act, seeking

a 25 percent convention endorsement for senatorial, congressional and gubernatorial candidated, emasculating the Sunshine Law, and a proposal that would have permitted school districts to drop kindergartens and use the money for other purposes.

What it should have done but didn't is another story to be analyzed later.