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Legislative limelights

Legislative comradery has disappeared

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After 40 years on the political scene, perhaps the most marked impression this year is the missing comradery among legislators, say, compared with 15 and even 10 years ago.

The business in the Statehouse is done much as usual, maybe even more efficiently, but the socializing after hours is virtually gone. It has left a void that many old-timers miss and hope might return.

The present-day lawmaker takes his job more seriously, is less inclined to fraternize with his fellow man, and much of the humor prevalent in session debates has disappeared, although there is some horseplay now and then.

After the campaign financial reporting law, known more commonly as the Sunshine Law, was placed in effect some four or five years ago, there was a drastic reduction in the dinners, luncheons, receptions and socials sponsored by the lobbyist for the legislators. This fear has largely dissipated now and there are just as many functions as ever.

The legislators are usually guests for two or three

such functions a week for at least the first half of the session when their ears can be bent by the lobbyists on certain bills. As the session progresses and time is short for enacting legislation, these get-togethers taper off until there are few if any the last two or three weeks.

For the legislators, it brings them benefits because it means free meals and refreshments. They feel their expense of \$44 daily in many cases is hardly enough.

The vast majority voted against raising the legislative expenses from \$44 to \$60 daily for those living outside of Boise and needing to maintain a second home while in Boise during the 70- to 80-day session. Those living in Boise also rejected the increase from \$25 to \$35 daily.

The vast majority privately say the expense hikes were needed but feared the wrath of the voters during these critical financial times.

This is deplorable because no taxpayer expects lawmakers to pay from their own pocket the privilege of serving in the Legislature.

In the old days after the daily sessions, most of

the legislators used to congregate at the old Boise Hotel Lamplighter room for socializing. It was often said with good reason that more legislation was concocted during these socials than was ever done at the Statehouse.

The question most frequently asked is where do the legislators now go after their day's work?

"They go home" is the frequent reply, although many do have small dinners or socials at the various restaurants and bars around town, but not like the Boise Hotel.

The Boise Hotel, of course, went out of business a decade ago and has been converted largely to professional offices. In fact a decade or more ago, a vast majority of the out-of-town lawmakers roomed at the nearby Boise Hotel. Now they usually are scattered in the various motels or rental units around the city.

It's with certain sorrow we see politics turning more serious, and in so many cases, downright vicious. Party lines, and especially philosophies, sharply divide many of the lawmakers. So much of the good-natured bantering has gone among the Republicans and Democrats. Like so many things, it appears the good old days are gone forever.