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Legislative limelights . . .

JFAC does flip-flop, receives pats on back

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BOISE — Perhaps one of the most delightful surprises at the Idaho Legislature now beginning its wind down is the performance of the heretofore much maligned Joint Finance-Appropriation Committee.

This committee, made up of 10 members from each the House and Senate, approves the state government budget, which is by far the most important task of the Legislature in any year.

As a result, and especially in recent years, it has come under constant fire for the domineering way it has gone about its job. This was especially true last year when the 12 conservative Republicans were dubbed by the news media and other legislators as "the dirty dozen" in the zealous way they went about in slashing Gov. John V. Evans' recommendations.

One of the shining lights of JFAC is the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee and JFAC co-chairman, Rep. Kitty Gurnsey, R-Boise. She is viewed as a moderate and a soothing influence for both the extremists on the left and right.

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This year's JFAC received almost universal praise from the governor, the minority Democrats, moderate Republicans, and, of course, the conservative Republicans.

True, it was criticized on some phases, but they were comparatively minor to the copious brickbats hurled last year from almost every quarter except the hard right-wingers.

The governor has been especially critical, along with the Democrats, but it is different this year.

The governor said his deepest disappointment was the failure of the JFAC to approve funding for the Division of Economic and Community Affairs but he expressed pleasure it granted the 5 percent public employee salary raises he recommended and the restoration of the Clear Air Bureau at a cost of \$190,000, thus drawing federal matching funds of \$570,000.

DECA got only \$129,000 but this was primarily for handling of federal block grants as compared with the \$544,400 he recommended. The governor said as a result DECA will be abolished, along with the administrator, Dan Emborg and his staff.

All of the legislative leaders, including Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs; Senate Minority Leader Ron Twilegar, D-Boise; House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls; House Majority Leader Walter E. Little, R-New Plymouth, and House Minor-

ity Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, had good words for JFAC, except for a few funding cases.

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JFAC approved a general fund budget of \$463,623,100, which is a 9 percent jump from the \$422,042,300 approved for the past fiscal year. However, it is well under the \$477,047,700 recommended by the governor. But the governor pointed out his figure included some \$9 million in loss of funds by the state complying to the Internal Revenue Service Code.

The governor also was pleased JFAC reversed itself and allocated \$100,000 to the Governor's Contingency Fund to be used for emergencies.

JFAC finished its task on the 57th day, which is several days earlier than usual, thus giving the remainder of the legislators a few extra days to view the legislation before adjournment.

The Legislature's 60th day was March 11, a date most legislators had hoped to adjourn, or at least on Saturday, the 62nd day. The session is now in its 66th day, with hopes it can finish Saturday, the 69th day, but probably will spill over until late next week.

Unlike past years, however, the JFAC deliberations did not delay adjournment. It has been legislative reapportionment and some foot-dragging by the Senate on a number of bills.

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The general fund budget shows substantial increases in most categories, including a 10.3 percent increase for public school support, or from \$195,000 in fiscal 1982 to \$215 million in fiscal 1983, only slightly below the governor's recommendation of \$216,519,000.

Nearly every department, division and bureau shows increases, except for DECA, Department of Insurance, self-governing agencies, State Board of Education office, special health education programs, laboratory services, eligibility services, State Hospital North, and attorney general.

The big Health and Welfare divisions also were given a boost, such as Medicaid by 8.4 percent to \$18,988,200, adult and aid to dependent children stayed the same at \$10,372,300, and Community Development Disabilities climbed 8.3 percent to \$4,795,700.

JFAC members said there were a number of split votes but they were made mainly on what they thought were the merits of a measure, rather than the almost unanimous philosophical vote of 12-8 against nearly all of the governor's recommendations last year. There are still efforts to restrict JFAC's powers and reducing the size of the committee would be one of the best steps.