

Tax cut syndrome puts damper on Legislature

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Perhaps more so than other recent years, Idaho legislators, except for those on key committees, are doing little in the legislative process because of the subduing effects of the 1 percent tax initiative.

The lawmakers who will have a key hand in drafting the 1 percent tax initiative implementation legislation are under intense pressure to come up with an acceptable plan that can also start the machinery for other bills. These committees are Joint Finance Appropriation, made up of 10 members each from the Senate and House, House Revenue and Taxation Committee, and Senate Local Government and Taxation Committee.

Other committees are fiddling around on other legislation, but on low gear until they find out clearly about the financial pictures. They know that appropriations will be cut to the core.

The 1 percent syndrome — if it can be called that — has placed a damper on the entire spectrum of legislation. This may be good because all too frequently in past sessions there were altogether too many bills introduced. Many of them were the same as previous sessions and others were the so-called pet bills of legislators who sought to mollify special interests and pressure groups and individuals.

For example, in the past week there were memorials introduced, such as backing the potato diversion program, which are hardly worth the paper they are written on and bring unnecessary cost to the state in time and money, regardless of their merits.

Most are passed for political opportunism, but it doesn't take much imagination to know they have little or no impact when received by Congress.

The only time memorials could bring attention is when they are accompanied by an Idaho delegation to ask for congressional action by the Idaho congressional delegation.

When Congress receives such memorials from states — and there must be scores each year — it's the same as Congress saying, "We have received your memorial and it is duly noted," and that's the end of that.

Rep. C. Wendell Miller, D-Idaho Falls, said there is interest in lifting the interest ceiling from 10 to 12 percent to ease the loaning money flow into Idaho for family home construction.

Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Iona, said he feels the economy mood of the Legislature is ripe to pass a bill that would block

the Department of Education proposal to require five years teaching degrees, thus saving hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Both veteran legislators agree there is a mood of economy rampant. Miller, for example, points out one bill calls for elimination of a higher education board which is considered unimportant and could save the state a third of a million dollars yearly.

One of the cleverest ploys coming out of the session was the board guidelines outlined by Democratic Gov. John V. Evans on the 1 percent tax initiative.

By eliminating a specific proposal and tossing the responsibility into the Republican controlled Legislature, Evans avoided giving the highly partisan Republican leadership an opportunity to shoot down the governor's proposals for political reasons.

Evans can be accused of lack of leadership by failure to present a specific proposal, but it likely will avoid the needless partisan hassles of past years which forced Democratic Govs. Cecil D. Andrus and Evans to veto tax revenue measures because they were heavily slanted in favor of big corporations and big business.

House Republicans are holding closed caucuses on the 1 percent initiative. This may be proper to allow free discussions up to a certain point. However, the entire tax relief package must receive bipartisan cooperation and support, or the same problems of past bickerings will be encountered.

Some of the tentative proposals suggested appear to carry merit. These include a bill to make the tax limit effective July 1; the mandatory cleaning up of language in the initiative to avoid constitutional flaws; authorizing local governments to issue bond with taxes higher than the 1 percent limitation if two thirds approve in an election; and holding the general fund budget to about \$319 million to permit pumping upwards of \$25-40 million into public education.

The mood is also changing on legislative pay and expense increase from that strongly manifested in the reorganization session in early December.

At that time, there was a resolution to reject the recommended increases but it stumbled after being caught in a partisan hassle.

Some legislators feel they are at least entitled to increase expenses to \$44 from present \$35 because of increased motel and food.