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Mood of Legislature changes

Compared with past Idaho Legislatures, signs are not good for the success of the 49th session that gets under way Monday.

On the debit side are the sluggish economy, possibly huge state government deficits and the unwieldy 126-member body.

On the plus side of the ledger, it is not an election year so that partisan overtones will be kept low. Both Democratic Gov. Cecil Andrus and the Republican legislative leadership have indicated a broader spectrum for bipartisan cooperation, and many emotional issues, such as right-to-work, abortion and the Equal Rights Amendment, are not likely to reappear.

Past sessions most recently have not been productive because of too much political bickering between the Democratic governor and the rigid conservative Republican leadership.

House Speaker Tom Stivers, R-Twin Falls, was the most combative leader to hold the post in this writer's 40 years of coverage. Stivers virtually left the House in shambles with the incessant intraparty bickering.

It's fortunate Stivers decided not to seek re-election because he obviously knew he would be deposed as House speaker. It would have left him much more bitter and vindictive. This happened to Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-

Soda Springs. Budge served in the top Senate leadership post four years, 1979-82. However, his brazen favoritism with cronies, lack of cooperation among many of his colleagues and reactionary tactics resulted in his ouster. He was replaced by Sen. James Risch, R-Boise, in the 1983 session.

Risch, a most capable and informed legislator, was hampered by the repressive tactics of both Stivers and Budge the last two sessions. As Budge also decided not to seek re-election for another term, it also will lessen the pressure on Risch, and many other lawmakers, for that matter.

Both Risch and his next in command, Majority Leader Mark G. Ricks, Rexburg, faced tough races with Democratic opponents in the November election. This should somewhat ease their rigid conservative stance of the last four years.

The other legislators in leadership roles in both the Senate and House are of a more moderate mien.

The 1986 session was noted mostly for what it did not do than for what it did. It was the most divisive and partisan session than can be remembered by veteran political writers and observers.

It did continue the 1-cent sales tax increases atop the 4 cents until July 1 but the revenue was not for educa-

tion. It was primarily for new state building construction and remodeling. The session also passed the flawed right-to-work law.

Perhaps its brightest achievement was passing a constitutional amendment limiting the Legislature's size to 105 members. It passed by an overwhelming majority in the November general election. This reduced Legislature, however, will not go into force until after the 1990 census.

Supporters went over the Legislature's head in getting petitions signed to get right-to-work and lottery proposals for the November ballot. It gave the people the opportunity to vote and they approved both the right-to-work referendum and the lottery initiative.

State Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho Falls, the new Senate assistant majority leader, in a recent talk in Idaho Falls, singled out financing, liability reform, city-county mandate and day-care licensing as the major issues for the new session. He expressed pleasure it likely will be a more progressive Legislature in the coming biennium.

He also predicted the drinking age will be raised to 21, and that the income tax law for Idaho will be changed to conform with the federal change. He added, however, there is a question whether it will reduce the

state income tax rates so that the state can get the additional revenue, estimated at upwards of \$20 million.

He also predicted the 1-cent sales tax hike will be extended beyond July 1.

Andrus, in cleaning house, has dipped into second-level management for the first time that can be remembered in at least 30 years. He has indicated he is going to make sure he has firm executive control of the 19 departments, which he had urged in his first term in 1974.

Normally, department heads appoint their lower-echelon personnel. Andrus has personally appointed or fired department and regional managers, including in the Department of Health and Welfare.

He has indicated that only some two or three appointees of his predecessor, Gov. John V. Evans, also a Democrat, will be retained.

He talked early with Risch and the new House speaker, Rep. Tom Boyd, R-Genesee, to set a new tone for bipartisan cooperation.

Relations between Andrus and Evans likely will be cooled by this heavy turnover even though they are from the same Democrat party.

Andrus told this writer earlier when he divulged his plans to clean house that Evans spoke in behalf of retaining some of his appointees, but Andrus replied, "I am resisting."