

Guessing games begin when session to end

Wed. Mar. 14, 1979

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

As the Idaho Legislature strives to finish its work, one of the most interesting guessing games is to figure out the dates for adjournment.

Before this first regular session of the 45th Legislature began, it was predicted it would be one of the longest on record, if not the longest, because of the complex 1 percent tax initiative.

Even at this time it looks like it likely will be the third longest, or maybe tied for that position, but with slim changes it will top any of previous sessions.

Most of the experienced legislators, including the leadership, now pick March 24, and a few even hazard this Saturday March 17, which is virtually impossible.

This writer feels March 24 is the earliest day, and there's an even chance it could go to about March 31, depending on the hassles that could take place next week.

If the session goes to March 24 it would be the 76th day; on March 31st, the 83rd day.

The longest regular session was the first one in 1890 when Idaho assumed statehood, and it ran 97 days.

Second was the one in 1967, when it dragged on for 89 days, and the third longest took place in 1974 for 76 days. Most sessions have ranged between 60 and 69 days.

The 1978 session went 69 days; 1977, 71 days; 1976, 75 days; the fourth longest; 1975, 68 days; 1974, 76 days; 1973, 75 days, tied for fourth, and 1971, 69 days, but 18 days more special sessions to handle reapportionment following the 1970 census. The special session was called immediately after the regular session which gave the legislators a solid 87 days.

The shortest regular session on record was 55 days in 1970.

Incidentally, to show the foolishness of ever trying to revert to biennial sessions, it was necessary to call special sessions every year between 1961 and 1968 except for 1962, when the sessions were biennial. The annual sessions were instituted in 1969, but before that there were held every two years.

It has been almost traditional that when the Legislature starts



Senate Democrats

Post-Register photo

BOISE — Sens. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, and Ron Twillegar, D-Boise, are two of the more influential senators at the Idaho Legislature.

a week it usually goes to Saturday, sometimes Friday, and once it even adjourned on a Thursday.

That's the reason legislators usually pick Saturday as the final day, and there have been times they have deliberated until midnight and even to early Sunday morning.

This usually is not advisable because considerable hasty bad legislation is shoved through in those hectic final hours. In many cases, this later causes legal complications and such faulty bills must be corrected the following session.

As most will agree, the quality of a Legislature is judged by the type of measures it enacts, not the great number of bills passed nor the length of session.

The Joint Finance Appropriation Committee has been understandably hampered by the 1 percent initiative limitation, mainly in seeking to cut budgets from what the governor recommended.

Rep. Doyle C. Miner, the harried co-chairman of the JFAC, said the final budgets will be completed later this week, maybe as early as Thursday.

The hard-working Miner feels if all goes well that the Legislature could then approve the final appropriation bills and go

home.

However, past sessions shows that all does not go well. This is when tempers get short and invariably some displeased legislator may require full reading of bills as a slowdown, or even stage a filibuster.

There are other delightful probabilities, such as partisan hassles which have been all too frequent in the Senate; bickering between Senate and House such as occurred in the legislative pay fiasco, and more probable, confrontation between Democratic Gov. John V. Evans and the Republican controlled legislative leadership.

It's indeed remote that some of these uprisings won't take place in these final days. They have for years and this year won't see an exception.

However, the weather is getting better and the farm legislators want to get on with their spring work. They may stay the remainder of the month but that's it.

It's unlikely the governor will call a special session except in the most extreme case, but it could happen. It appears, however the budget cuts so far are not that deep and objectionable after Evans protested last week.

So it looks like going home time either March 24 or March 31, likely the latter.