

Legislative limelights . . .

East Idaho legislators star in 1979 session

Sun. Apr 1, 1979

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

East Idaho legislators turned in a commendable performance in the past session, which appears to have marked up a positive record.

The Legislature, the third longest in its 89-year-old history, with 78 days, did the job it was supposed to do in implementing the all-important 1 percent initiative; granting a hefty 48 million tax relief for the largest ever, and enacting a number of other essential bills.

Its record of achievement came in the final two weeks, after it appeared to be stumbling for most of the session.

Perhaps the two from East Idaho who stood out among the 105 men and women who make up the legislative body were Reps. Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot, and Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls.

Young was praised by all his colleagues for his work in drafting House Bill 166, which implemented the 1 percent initiative.

Young, a rather quiet-spoken, modest farmer, is serving only his second term.

Young headed the subcommittee under the special joint committee, made up of six senators and six state representatives under Rep. Morgan Munger, R-Ola, which untied the 1 percent implementation knot.

Mrs. Kearnes won the admiration of most of her colleagues as chairwoman of the House Health and Welfare Committee. She shifted to a moderate stance to help bring about some beneficial legislation.

Mrs. Kearnes, who has served since 1971, was part of the progressive contingent of some 15 or 16 Republicans who often joined the tight band of 20 Democrats to enact many pieces of beneficial legislation over the opposition of the negative ultra-conservatives.

She also was a member of the high-ranking House State Affairs Committee and her swing vote frequently passed beneficial bills to the floor for favorable action.

As chairwoman of the House Health and Welfare Committee she was instrumental in helping



Top legislators

BOISE — Among the top East Idaho Legislators at the past Legislature are, seated, Reps. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, and standing from left, Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls; Doyle C. Miner, R-St. Anthony; and Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot.

bring additional funding for important health and welfare funds to help the aged, sick, poor and the handicapped.

She fought for certificate of need legislation, but it failed ingloriously in her committee, 10-2. Only one other member of her committee joined her in seeking passage.

She was against a day care center licensing bill, believing it might drive a number of operators out of business unnecessarily.

A number of other East Idaho legislators also played important roles.

These included the committee chairmen, such as Sens. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, of the Senate Resources and Environment Committee and member of State Affairs; and Dane Watkins, R-Idaho

Falls, of the Agricultural Affairs Committee and first time member of the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee; Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, the only East Idahoan in Legislature leadership, as chairman of the minority caucus committee; and Richard A. Egbert, dean of the Legislature, with 30 years service as one of the most

influential members of the JFAC.

Over in the House were Reps. Doyle C. Miner, R-St. Anthony, the hard-working conscientious, cochairman of the JFAC; John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, chairman of the House Transportation Committee; and Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the House Education Committee, which gave public education preferred treatment.

Lorenzo, joined the moderate forces at times on key House votes, while the only two East Idaho Democratic state representatives, Melvin Hammond, Rexburg, and Wendell Miller, Idaho Falls, were usually on the side of progressive legislation.

Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Iona, was particularly helpful in water legislation; Rep. Ray E. Infanger, R-Salmon, member of the JFAC, solidly backed vocational educational funding; Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, helped draft the 1 percent legislation; and three neophytes, Sen. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg and Reps. Gary L. Paxman, R-Idaho Falls; and Raymond G. Parks, R-Blackfoot, generally followed a strong party line as freshmen legislators.