

Legislative limelights . . .

Most citizens give low marks to Legislature

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The Idaho Poll, which gives the 1979 Idaho Legislature extremely low marks, must be viewed with reservation.

The poll, conducted by the Boise-based Resources Group, asked Idahoans throughout the state how they rated the efforts of the Legislature to implement Proposition 1, the 1 percent tax limitation initiative.

It must be disconcerting to the lawmakers that they received a mark of 26.7 percent "very poor," 30.4 percent "poor" and 32.3 percent "average." Only 6.2 percent thought it was "good" and 4.3 percent "very good."

Even Howard Scharg, the poll editor, was skeptical.

He said "one should remember that the general attitude toward politics is quite negative. Consequently, a question concerning politics will elicit responses involving a negative bias. The above responses are probably not as objective as we would like."

House Bill 166 was the main law to implement the 1 percent initiative. The Legislature also approved measures to cut property taxes 13 mills to grant some \$31 million in tax relief, plus about \$17 million to be realized by holding local units of government budgets in 1979 and 1980 to the 1978 levels, a total of \$48 million tax relief.

In addition, about \$12.3 million more is realized as continuing from last year from the 4 mill tax cut amounting to \$9.3 million and \$3 million from the circuit breaker for senior citizens.

This writer feels the Legislature turned in a generally positive record, mainly in implementing the 1 percent tax initiative. This was its dominant task, plus passing a property tax relief package which is the largest in the state's history.

Even Gov. John V. Evans, who was at loggerheads with the Republican legislative leaders most of the session, gave the Legislature a B or B-plus mark.

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With justification, he was displeased with its failure to enact proper local option laws for cities and counties, an oversight which the legislators may deeply regret later.

The governor has threatened to call a special session this summer on this very matter. Another special session topic may be Certificate of Need legislation, lack of which jeopardizes some \$12.3 million in federal matching funds for health programs.

However, the governor may be shooting a little fast on the local option issue because most cities and counties won't realize the jarring impact until after the 1 percent limitation goes into effect Jan. 1, 1980. There should be time enough in the 1980 session to take remedial actions.

Most so-called experts will say what the limitation will do but the conflicting statements give support to the suspicion that no one really knows — they are mostly speculating.

Regarding the certificate of need, Sen. John Barker, R-Buhl, who spearheaded passage of this measure in the Senate which in the past has been the stumbling block, says there will be time in the 1980 session to pass this bill. The deadline actually is Sept. 30, 1980.

Despite the derisive way in which the Legislature is viewed, it is noticeable that legislators are re-elected, year after year. The few who are beaten generally lose for other reasons than in the way they voted. It may be personal or philosophical, or because his opponent was more popular and campaigned harder. And it may be principally because too few can afford to desert their occupations to serve in the Legislature — a continuing

Idaho problem.

In the six legislative districts of East Idaho in the last 12 years only three incumbents seeking re-election have been beaten. The scorecard in the remainder of the state is similar.

This also is regretful, as the shoddy and negative performance of many lawmakers should be reason for their ouster.

Most East Idaho legislators turned in rather creditable performances and the others, at least, didn't do any damage. That in itself is a plus.

There was an atmosphere of keeping legislation at a minimum, and this helped. Only about 350 bills were passed of some 680 introduced. Last year 387 bills were passed of 737 introduced. A flurry of bills introduced in the closing days this year closed the gap with previous years, noted Mardee Wyman, administrator of the Legislative Data Center.