

Idaho Legislature trying

The 47th Idaho Legislature has a problem.

It's one legislators haven't been faced with since Idaho went into business back in 1890 when it accepted statehood. In fact, the state wasn't even the kind of shape it is in now during the depression in the 30s.

The problem, as anyone can guess, is money — lots of it.

The 105 lawmakers, together with Gov. John V. Evans, are bound by the knowledge they must scrape up enough of the green stuff to keep the state in the black. The State Constitution says it can't be otherwise.

Legislators are often the butt of jokes, but what they do is not that funny. It affects all Idahoans' pocketbooks, ways of life and yes, even morals.

Budget

Until a couple of years ago, the Legislature had the luxury of deciding on how to divide up a budget surplus.

In 1981, financial goings on became a little sticky, but legislators were still able to pass along a little tax relief and maintained a small surplus. In 1982, money became tighter and although there was no surplus, no alarms were sounded.

The Legislature even approved a generous 10 percent budget increase, which proved to be a mistake. The economic recession rolled in from the east and smacked Idaho all the way from the northern panhandle to the murky shores of Bear Lake. Revenues nosedived, bringing on the present shortfalls.

Personalities

With a few exceptions, legislators have one common denominator: They are sincere and dedicated to helping the state.

Many are downright lazy, and some are dullards. Some are hard workers and others are brilliant, but each is his or her own way is concerned.

One of the wonders in the State Capitol is to see a few of them diligently hammering away at legislation while so many others back and do little more than vote — sometimes not even knowing what they are voting on.

Most legislators like the comparatively mild climate of Boise and return year after year. Perhaps more than 80 percent are re-elected and few incumbents are ever defeated. Most often, there is a change in a seat, it is because someone chooses not to run again.

Eastern Idaho's delegaton, for example, has been largely unchanged for the last dozen years. This year, however, there are two newcomers due to the retirement of veterans. They are State Reps. J.F. Chadband, R-Idaho Falls, who replaced Elair Kearnes; and JoAn Wood, R-Rigby, who succeeded Wayne Tibbitts.

Winning majority leadership roles this year were four veterans: Sens. J. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, elevated to Senate majority leader, the No. 2 spot in the upper chamber; J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, tapped for Senate majority caucus chairman; Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, the House majority caucus chairman; and Dwight Horsch, D-Aberdeen, House minority caucus chairman.

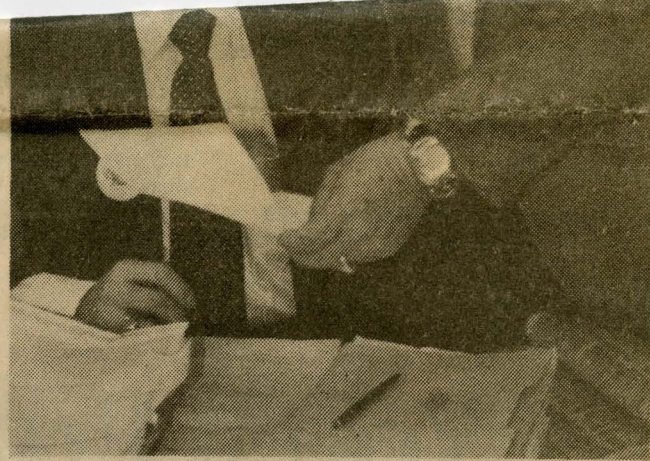
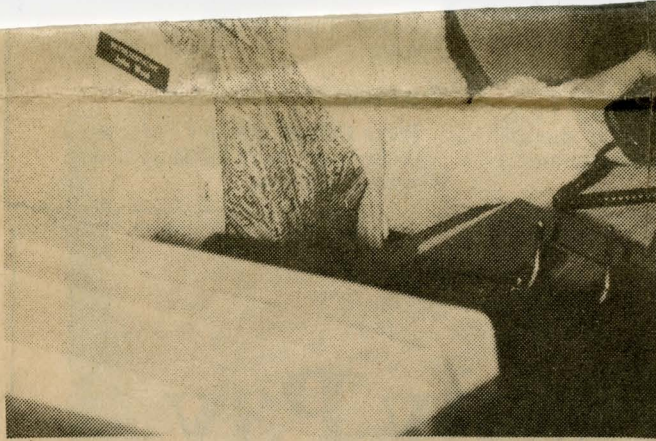
A holdover is Rep. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, the durable House minority leader.

The Eastern Idaho delegation holds five committee chairmanships, three of nine in the Senate and two of 13 in the House. They are Sens. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, Local Government and Transportation; Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, Agriculture and Affairs; and Willian L. Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, Commerce and Labor; and Reps. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, Transportation; and Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, Education.

Stories and photos
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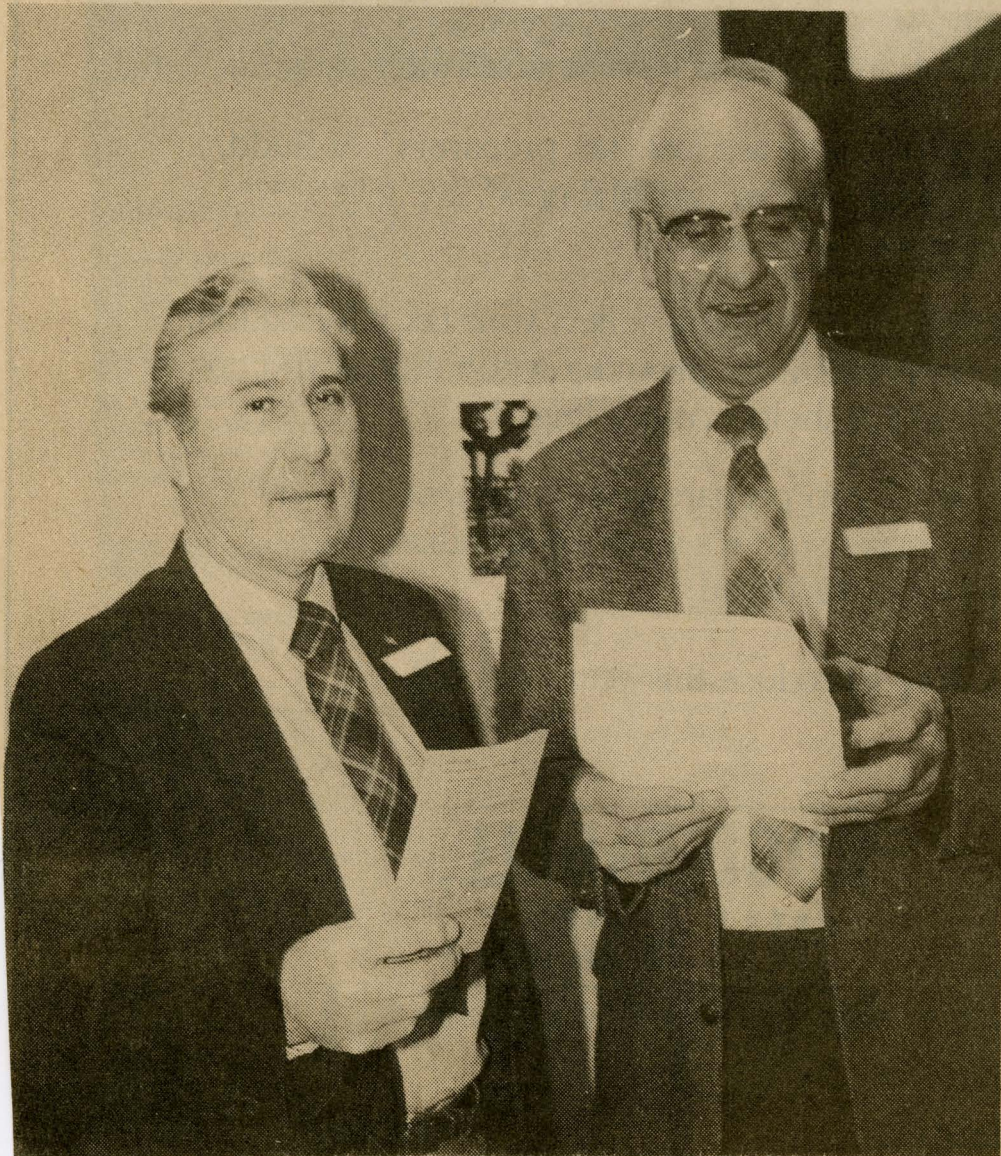


Freshmen legislators

THE TWO freshmen state representatives from east Idaho are Joan Wood, R-Rigby, and J.F. Chadband, R-Idaho Falls

Idaho Falls senators

DISCUSSING A BILL are two Idaho Falls senators, Dane Watkins, seated, and William L. Floyd.



Senate leaders

SENATE LEADERS from left are Majority Caucus Chairman J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls; and Majority Chairman Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg.

g to make ends meet

Legislative sessions in recent years have varied from a record 55 days in the prosperous year of 1970 to 89 in 1967. The average session is about 70 days. The Legislature met 73 days in 1982, 75 in 1971, 85 in 1980 (the third longest session), 78 in 1979 and 69 in 1978. In addition, there have been special sessions, such as last summer's 14-day conference to hammer out legislative reapportionment.

Routine session

The Legislature is rather routine.

Lawmakers generally arrive at 8 or 9 a.m. to attend major committee meetings, check their mail, phone constituents, dictate letters or perform other tasks as they see fit.

Major committees generally meet in the mornings two or three times during the week. Minor ones meet in the afternoon to avoid as much conflict as possible for those who serve on two or more committees.

The all important Joint Finance-Appropriation Committee usually meets at 8 a.m. for two or three, first to hear the department requests, then consider supplemental appropriations — if there are any, and it will be skimpy indeed this year. JFAC is made up of 20 members — 10 each from the House Appropriation Committee and Senate Finance Committee.

Sometimes, committee hearings are held in the evenings to better accommodate the public on major or emotional issues. The less important, however, take place in the early mornings or afternoons.

Committee meetings dominate the session at the start with the general sessions generally a half an hour or less, usually beginning at 11 or 11:30 a.m. Then as the Legislature progresses, the committee meetings become shorter, and correspondingly, the general sessions are longer. Near the end, the general sessions occupy

most of the day with few committee meetings.

Legislators can submit their personal bills the first 20 days and all standing committees can introduce bills the first 35 days. After that, only the JFAC and State Affairs committees of both chambers have the power to act on bills. In addition, the Senate Judiciary and Rules, House Ways and Means and House Revenue and Taxation Committees can act on bills the entire session.

In recent years it has been the governor's practice to host the leadership once a week at an informal light breakfast, generally on Wednesday mornings, to keep the lines of communications open.

Republicans control the House 51-19 and the Senate 21-14, but the Democrats have two votes to spare to sustain a governor's veto.

Legislative pay has been \$5,115 the past two sessions, compared with \$4,200 in 1979-80. Compensation of \$44 daily boost the amounts to \$8,195 yearly.

This year

The Legislature rejected an expense increase to \$60 monthly only Tuesday, and also turned down pay increases two years ago.

Lobbyists are indeed active and legislators are invited nearly daily to dinners and luncheons for the first half to two-thirds of the session. These fall off at the tail end of the session when lobbyists know there is little or no time to influence lawmakers' decisions on bills.

Legislators generally get nervous after 70 days and want to go home. The favorite saying in late March then is "it's time for spring plowing," and they begin packing up to go home, no matter how many bills are still in the hopper.

The public also is glad for them to come home, not so much to welcome them, but before they do any more damage.



East Idaho legislators

GETTING TOGETHER for a short break during a session of the Idaho Legislature are seated, Reps. John O. Driggs, and standing from left, Kurt L. Johnson,

Idaho Falls; Joan Wood, Rigby; Linden B. Bateman, Idaho Falls; Gary L. Paxman, Idaho Falls, and Martin Trillhaase, all Republicans.