Legislative limelights . . .

1980 Idaho Legislature likely to spin wheels

The Post-Register

The political pulse

C-4 Idaho Falls, Idaho, Thursday, Nov. 29, 1979

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The 1980 Idaho Legislature, due to convene Jan. 7 likely will do as little as possible on taxes because of two significant factors.

The first, of course, is the 1 Percent Tax Initiative which dominated the 1979 session. The second reason is a new one — the early May 27 primary, moved up from its traditional August date.

As observed previously, the lawmakers are in no mood to tinker with the tax initiative, most of them taking the view that the majority of the people (58 percent) voted for it and therefore they should live with it.

The May primary, which also is combined with the presidential primary and likely will coax out a record number of voters, comes early enough so that the eletors will remember vividly what the legislators did during the session in January, February and March. In past years, what the legislators did during the winter was largely forgotten in August.

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Unfortunately, the 105 men and women who attend the legislature feel they will do only what has to be done to implement the 1 percent restriction. From all reports this would indicate extending the local government freeze for another year or two, shoving local government deeper into a financial morass.

The Legislature doesn't worry much about state government. They will get enough to finance the state agencies, with an increase of possibly 10 percent. This leaves the cities, counties and school districts to scratch out a financial living for themselves.

Under the State Constitution, the State Legislature is obligated to set up machinery for their local govnermental units, but it doesn't have to give them a dime.

The vast majority of those elected to the state's law-making bodies are sincere and concerned. Of course, they will do what they can to help the local government, particularly the school districts, but they don't feel they need to "emasculate" state agencies to do this.

The proposal of Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, to increase the sales tax by 1 percent and divert the $30 million to cities and counties is an excellent idea, but it likely will make little headway with federal legislators facing a May election.

Another proposal to raise the gasoline tax 3 cents and triple the vehicle registration fee is also worthy but it is doubtful that it will get far. The State Transportation Department noted it needs $39 million to keep up with needed highway improvements and maintenance. This tax is levied on the motorists who use the highway and is not a property tax.

Vehicle owners won't like this tax, but it must be remembered the overall tax and registration costs in Idaho to operate an automobile is far lower than most states. As it is one of the largest states geographically in the union, it still must maintain many roads — some 11,000 miles to be exact — on the state highway system, plus thousands of miles more county roads and streets.

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Gov. John V. Evans holds a strategic niche in all of the state proceedings. His term runs two more years beyond 1980.

As a result, he has a freer hand and voice to recommending tax increases for sales, gasoline, local option or others.

Both he and the Legislature, of course, shy away from any property tax increase in view of the 1 Percent Initiative.

It will be interesting to see what happend in view of the political conditions don't expect too much.