

Statehouse sidelights . . .

JFAC optimistic 1981 state revenue ample

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Discussions at the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee in meetings in Idaho Falls last week indicate the state financial picture may not be as severe as originally thought as result of the 1 Percent Initiative — at the state level.

John C. Andreason, director of the Legislative Fiscal Office, has asked all state agencies to submit figures before the Legislature opens on basis of what he calls a "100 percent budget," or one similar to the current one for fiscal 1980.

Andreason explained he was sincere in taking such a step so that state agencies and other entities could operate on such funding if it became necessary.

Jerry Evans, state school superintendent, and J. Clint Hoopes, Tetonia, president of the State Board of Education, who represent the main education operations which account for 70 percent of the general fund budget, convinced the JFAC that such a step was unnecessary.

Upshot of the discussion was passage of a resolution to exempt all state agencies from report of a 100 percent budget for fiscal 1981 until the day after the Legislative Revenue Projection Committee releases its anticipated revenue. This is generally forthcoming the second week of the Legislature, which this coming year convenes Jan. 9.

Hoopes explained the State Board could not keep its budget figures secret, because by law its board meetings are open, unlike that of most agencies.

Both Hoopes and Evans agreed early release of a 70 percent funding budget last fall created unnecessary difficulties as many thought there would be severe cutbacks. As it turned out, most agencies received slight increases, although generally they did not offset the inflation jump of 10 percent or more. Actually, public education received privileged treatment under the lean circumstances.

The most encouraging development was a report from Bruce Balderson, Boise, the new legislative auditor. He reported general fund revenues so far this year are clicking along at close to 13 percent increase, about what it has been yearly the past 10 years.

He said corporate and income tax revenue has been showing a 13 percent advance. Sales tax also was clipping along at this rate, but in the last couple of months slumped to 8 percent. Whether this was temporary or would surge again to 13 percent is something that will need watching, he said. However, he cautioned, it's a factor that must be considered.

Balderson noted that a 10 percent increase would hike the 1980 fiscal current budget of \$357 million to \$392 million for the next fiscal year. A 13 percent jump would place it near \$402 million.

Most committee members, including Rep. Doyle C. Miner, R-St. Anthony, committee co-chairman, are sanguine that revenue may be adequate for the funding state government in fiscal 1981 that might even offset the inflation costs of 10 percent or more.

The biggest headache will be funding for local governments — cities, counties and school districts — and that's an entirely different story. It could slash into the state income.



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Key East Idaho senators

THE OLDEST, AND YOUNGEST East Idaho members of the powerful Joint Finance Appropriation Committee are Sens. Richard A. Egbert, D-Tetonia, left, who has served nearly 30 years in the Legislature; and Mark Ricks, R-Rexburg, who was named to the committee last year. The committee determines funding for state government. The committee toured East Idaho last week.