Governor, Legislature deep chasm serious

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Not as long as can be remembered has there been such a serious deadlock between the governor and Legislature as the present one over state budget funding.

Democratic Gov. John V. Evans and the Republican-controlled Legislature appear to have reached an impasse on where the deepest cuts are to be made. Both apparently agree the fiscal 1980 budget shall be no higher, or at least, not much higher than the one in 1979.

The point of contention lies in the governor's recommendation for a $336 million budget and $24.5 million to public education. The Legislature, or at least the Republican controlled Joint Finance Appropriation Committee, favors a $322 million budget with about $35.3 million going to public shools. To do this the Republicans want to slash state agencies that fund health and welfare, education and other such services.

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Evans has the 16 Democratic senators and 20 Democratic state representatives solidly behind him. The Republican leadership, by some of its actions, does not have unanimous political support as has been shown on a number of partisan votes. There are some dozen moderate Republican House members and two or three Republican senators who have frequently joined the solid Democratic phalanx. That's enough to beat the Republican leadership in both chambers.

It must be observed that most people want what money is available to go for public education, but they don't want to see such programs as vocational education, higher education, mental health and other human services obliterated either.

From a technical point of view, the State Legislature is not obligated to pump money to local school districts for public education. It must under the Constitution first fund its own state government.

The chickens are coming home to roost for those who voted for the 1 percent initiative. As had been predicted repeatedly beforehand, the 1 percenter was not needed in Idaho which had always shown fiscal responsibility, kept state budgets in the black, usually finished with surpluses, and its tax rates are among the lowest in the nation. Maybe these voters have suggestions on how local units should be funded, or cut out services.

What we are seeing now is the governor and Legislature fighting over the bones. It's the old familiar theme of cut out programs and the fat, but not mine.

Polls since the election show that people didn't know what they were voting for. Many will say it was to send a message they want taxes reduced and to cut big government spending. But that message should go to the federal government, not state and local governments, although some things could be done on the state level, like make taxing more uniform, neutralizing the tax shift to homes and farms, providing more local tax options, and more coordinated local government.

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The sorry scene of two members of the JFAC, Sen. Walter Yarbrough, R-Grand View, and Rep. Dan Emery, R-Boise, walking out of a meeting with the governor last Friday morning reflects the deep rift.

The governor called in the members in an effort to resolve the differences. Apparently, the diehard Republican members weren't listening. It was unusual for the governor to do this but this JFAC performance is the worst in years and drastic action was needed.

Two members of the committee, Sen. Dean Van Engelen, R-Burley, who is known as the most vociferous committee member, and Rep. Doyle C. Miner, R-St. Anthony, chairman of the House Appropriation Committee, have now appealed to people to let legislators know what direction to take.

Their statements were to the effect the joint committee is trying to keep schools and local units of government afloat by holding state budget levels and help local government to survive.

Their simplified version, however, is a distortion.

For one thing, the joint committee has slashed state budgets in many departments — not holding levels —and this is what the governor has objected to. He has asked the Republican members of the joint committee to spell out what programs they want cut, thus letting them take the responsibility.

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This writer attended a joint committee hearing when it took 30 minutes arguing over three motions on a $1,500 appropriation for the Department of Administration. At that rate it's no wonder the committee's progress has kept at a snail's pace. Certainly, such details should be left to department directors in a $350 million budget.

Sen. David Little, R-Emmett, the committee co-chairman, now admits the committee may need to reopen budgets which in the past have been kept at a minimum. This could call for further delays.

As observed previously, the lack of legislative leadership and an unwillingness to compromises isn't helping.

But after mid-March, the legislators will get nervous enough to want to adjourn and they have found solutions to bring this about in the past.

Post-Register photo

Angry governor

BOISE— Gov. John V. Evans angrily denounced the Republican controlled Legislature at this recent news conference in his office for what he called its indiscriminate slashing of state budgets. The action has precipitated a bitter battle between the Democratic governor and the Republican leadership.