

Rep. Stiver's tax proposal another unrealistic thrust

By BEN J. PLASTINO

A proposal by Idaho House Speaker Tom Stivers to give back as much as \$21 million of an anticipated state budget surplus to Idaho taxpayers is astonishing, to say the least.

It is not only a blatant political thrust, but entirely unrealistic in view of financial troubles the state is experiencing as result of a weak state economy.

Idaho needed to drastically reduce expenditures all along the line for the current fiscal year, and particularly so for education.

Stivers' remarks to the Associated Taxpayers of Idaho last week further underscore his attitude of lack of cooperation with Democratic Gov. John V. Evans and many of the more moderate legislators.

Stivers contended that this surplus is taxpayers' money that was extracted in larger amounts than the 1984 budget required. He also has called for termination of the 1.5 percent boost in the state sales tax due to expire next July.

All this sounds fine, but Idahoans have indicated they want to see education and other state services upgraded, not a further cut, as Stivers' proposals would bring about.

Stivers' lack of cooperation is vividly recalled by looking at the steamroller tactics he used during the May special session last year. They created deep partisan rifts that will carry over to future Legislatures.

It was Stivers' pre-legislative boast that the special session called primarily to increase educational funding "would last four or five hours." Indeed, as far as the House was concerned, that's exactly what happened. He banged the gavel at 2:30 p.m. on the session's opening day adjourned sine die (indefi-

nitely) at 7:30 p.m.

The Senate churned on for a couple more days, but there is little it could do after the House members had recessed.

Stivers, unlike his predecessor, House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, also of Twin Falls, does not seek compromises.

He is a colorful, quick-draw, outspoken individual. His approach gets results in many cases, but it leaves many ruffled feelings, not only among the Democrats but many legislators of his own Republican party.

Stivers used several tactics in the special session that violated legislative protocol.

He unilaterally refused Evans' request to address the joint session and induced his Senate counterpart, President Pro Tem James Risch, to go along with this breach of courtesy. It was the first time such a deplorable event has occurred in the Idaho Legislature.

Actually it got Evans more publicity than would have occurred if he had given his 10-minute talk.

Instead of separately drafting the four education bills on public schools, higher education, vocational education and agricultural research-extension services, he had them crammed in a single omnibus bill.

He then assigned all of the bills for action in the House to the Ways and Means Committee, which is under the speaker's strict control. This measure under normal procedures should have been referred to the germane House Appropriations Committee.

The arrogant Stivers then adjourned the House as quickly as possible without waiting for Senate action. By doing this, he did comply to a constitutional provision under Article 3 Section 9 which permits adjournment of one chamber without consent of the other providing the one chamber

adjourns within three days of the other.

However, in adjourning, he gave the Senate no chance to make changes because the adjourned House would have been required to do the same.

In 1980, the Senate adjourned without consent of the House and the senators had to come back at their own expense to finish their business.

As if this wasn't enough, Stivers, also on his own, held in his desk without a vote a bill passed by the committee and sponsored by Rep. Gordon Hollifield, R-Jerome, to repeal the half-cent sales tax.

Stivers told me beforehand that he did not see any purpose in a joint session, that Evans would say nothing new. Risch acquiesced to Stivers' actions.

Two Republican senators, C.A. Smyser, Parma, and William Ringert, Boise, apologized on the Senate floor for the shameful behavior of their leaders. The governor's office also reported a number of other Republican legislators sent letters or called expressing their regret at the action of Stivers and Risch.

It's against this abrasive background that the 1984 Legislature will return to session next month in efforts to enact legislation to keep the state government in business the next year.

A previous legislative leader, Sen. Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, was kicked out as Senate president pro tem at the start of the 1983 session for his non-compromising attitude in previous sessions.

The same could happen to Stivers at the start of the 48th session in 1985, particularly if reapportionment drastically changes the makeup of the Legislature.

(Ben Plastino is the retired political editor of The Post-Register and continues to write a periodical column.)