

Legislative limelights...

Legislature to tackle non-partisan issues

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The special session of the Idaho Legislature which is scheduled to convene Monday should be largely non-partisan but in this highly political year this likely won't be the case.

The governor and the Republican leaders in all their wisdom will primarily tackle three main issues, which in the regular session cut fairly evenly across party lines.

The top proposals are \$450,000 for June payments for Aid to Dependent Children; deletion of the provision that the state pay its Medicaid patients "full and reasonable costs" which could cost the state millions now and in the future; limiting the second legislative session to revenue and budget matters; and \$16 million more for state highway maintenance and improvements though a 2 cent per gallon state tax increase and truck ton mileage fee.

The governor likely will add other matters, but this may wait to determine the attitude of the legislators.

In this category would be funding for some five or six positions for the governor's budget and planning staff and for the legislative staff; and four narcotics agents. It is strictly up to the governor on what he wants to include in his call but he has left it clear he wants the cooperation of the legislators.

The increased highway funding bill passed the House on a non-partisan vote. As much of this funding may go for East Idaho highways, it was supported by all East Idaho state representatives except three ultra conservatives, Reps. Gary L. Paxman, R-Idaho Falls; Ray E. Infanger, R-Salmon, and Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo. However, Tibbitts said he would go for a 1 cent increase, rather than the 2

cents.

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Over in the Senate it was, of all things, the Senate minority leader, Sen. Cy C. Chase, D-St.Maries, who brought about the defeat of the highway funding. Chase had a personal difference with Darrell V. Manning, state transportation director, on the issue that he didn't think the state was doing enough for North Idaho highways. However, Chase, a vehicle dealer, also took a special interest stance when he opposed the truck fee increase.

Chase had enough influence to defeat the truck fee increase proposal by a 19-16 vote. Other senators then decided not to push the 2 cent gas tax increase on grounds that if truckers didn't pay for an increase, then neither should vehicle owners.

It would appear then that this issue will be fought over again as Chase has indicated he will oppose the increase on behalf of the North Idaho truckers.

The Department of Health and Welfare can be largely blamed for not pressing for funding for its 13,000 children and 7,000 mothers under the welfare program. The officials badly miscalculated the fund and did seek to get increased money but apparently did not make their demands known strong enough. The governor raised the serious situation in the closing days but by that time the Legislature was locked in a nasty partisan fight that precluded calm decisions.

The DHW knew about the shortfall a month before the Legislature adjourned but it would appear the officials did not make it emphatic enough, particularly to the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee. The Republican leadership also didn't particularly concern itself with funding for the poor, sick and disabled.

Several members of the JFAC in a meeting in Idaho Falls last week said they were not aware of the problems. The bill that would have amended the offending Medicaid law passed the Senate but a combination of Democrats and moderate Republicans sent it to a committee on the grounds the Medicaid patients should get full payments, even though warned the law might be unconstitutional.

The Democrat-moderate Republican faction sincerely sought to get the full loaf, wouldn't settle for half of loaf, and now gets only a thin slice until the issue is settled by an expected suit to be filed by the state.

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Adding the third proposal for biennial budgeting is a surprise but certainly nothing new in the Legislature. Perhaps the 85 days of the last session and the comparative little the lawmakers accomplished has prompted the move more than anything else.

A biennial budget proposal has been kicked around the Legislature for a dozen years. It never got out of committee but once, if memory is correct. Reps. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, and Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, have had this bill hanging around for years but finally got discouraged so they didn't push it the last two sessions.

It likely will shorten the one budget session considerably, even though many of the legislators from the cold climes like to hang around the milder weather in Boise during the winter.

Both Utah and Oregon with larger populations have this system and it appears to be working extremely well.

The mood appears right so it's a wise decision to consider this legislation at the special session.