

Opinion

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Winners and losers at the Idaho Legislature

The legislators you elected in November met this week to elect leaders and carve up committee assignments.

Who won out? Who lost? Here is a Valley stock report:

➤ **Up:** Sen. John McGee, R-Caldwell. He built his cache as chairman of the Senate Transportation Committee. But Transportation figures to take a lower profile, since lawmakers are in no hurry to talk seriously about finding new money for highway repairs.

No matter for McGee, who moves into GOP leadership as caucus chairman. A move becoming a young, upwardly mobile senator.

➤ **Down:** Sen. Russ Futchler, R-Meridian. The week's boldest gamble backfired. He gave up the caucus chair to seek the Senate's highest leadership post, president pro tem. Brent Hill of Rexburg got the job. No longer in leadership, Futchler's consolation prize is a vice chairman's spot — albeit on the powerful State Affairs Committee.

➤ **Up:** Four new leaders. In addition to McGee, four other Valley lawmakers have spots in leadership: Sen. Chuck Vander, R-Boise, assistant majority leader; Sen. Les Bock, D-Boise, assistant minority leader; Rep. Elfrida Higgins, D-Garden City, assistant minority



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leader and Rep. Brian Cronin, D-Boise, minority caucus chairman. Small-world alert. In 2003, Cronin worked on Dave Bieter's successful campaign.

➤ **Up:** Sen. Mitch Tetryanski, R-Boise. Serving his first term, Tetryanski landed a plum assignment on the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee.

➤ **Up:** Reps. Marv Hagedorn, R-Meridian, and John Vander Woude, R-Nampa. Both landed spots on JFAC. A win also for the Valley, which will hold five of 20 seats on JFAC, up from just three in 2009 and 2010. JFAC won't be a fun job in 2011, but at least the Valley will be well-represented.

➤ **Down:** Rep. Cliff Bayer, R-Boise. He lost a challenge to House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star. He also lost a JFAC seat. Things could have been worse; this cerebral number-

cruncher trades one wonky gig for another, as he joins the crucial House Revenue and Taxation Committee.

➤ **Down:** Rep. Robert Schaefer, R-Nampa. He has been elected to a 14th term, so he gets love from his constituents. Not so from House leadership. Schaefer lost his chairmanship of the House Commerce and Human Resources Committee. After 26 years in the Statehouse, he didn't even land a vice chairmanship.

Even Rep. Phil Hart, R-Hayden, landed a vice chairmanship — in between appearances before the House Ethics Committee.

CRAPPO'S COURAGEOUS VOTE

Sen. Mike Crapo could have found plenty of excuses to vote against a controversial deficit-reduction plan Friday.

He could have objected to the limits on Medicare growth, a sensitive subject for AARP members in Idaho. Or the increases in the Social Security retirement age. Or the elimination of the child tax credit, or the tax break on interest on mortgages. Or the 15-cent increase in the federal gas tax. There were plenty of ugly options to single out.

The Idaho Republican also could have voted no simply be-

cause his yes vote didn't change the outcome.

To his credit, Crapo joined 10 other members of the president's debt panel and supported the \$4 trillion worth of unsavory deficit-cutting medicine. The 11-7 vote fell short of the 14 votes needed to send this blueprint to Congress. But I still hope the committee's effort provides a framework for serious discussions about the deficit.

In a joint statement with Sen. Tom Coburn, R-Okla., a fellow supporter, Crapo said the plan was "flawed and incomplete." Even at that, this plan was packed with political toxins.

In 18 years in Congress, Crapo has proven himself to be measured, even cautious. On Friday, he voted for something drastic. That alone should tell Idahoans plenty about the dire condition of the federal budget.

CONGRESS TO THE RESCUE ...

Somewhere there is a mute button on a TV remote control that will live a longer and happier life — all thanks to Congress.

Not to be sidetracked by trifles such as the deficit, the House found time to pass a bill to stamp out loud commercials, or more accurately, ads that try to grab the viewer's attention with a sudden

increase in volume.

If nothing else, the legislation has the requisite catchy title: the Commercial Advertisement Loudness Mitigation Act, or CALM Act.

Who could possibly vote against calm? No one, evidently. On Thursday, the House passed this bill on a voice vote (so to voice, I hope). The Senate passed this bill by unanimous consent.

Nikki Watts, a spokeswoman for Rep. Mike Simpson, R-Idaho, says the office has heard from constituents who don't like loud commercials.

Who'd have guessed? Personally, that gratifying over-the-top pitchwoman for Progressive Insurance never fails to set my teeth on edge. I just never would have thought to call my congressional representative.

But I can only conclude that constituents are getting the Congress they've asked for. Now, can we mute that debate over the Bush tax cuts? Doubt count on it.

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