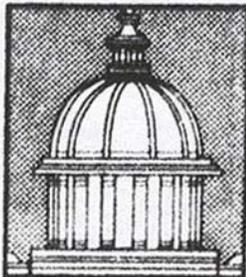


Legislature's titans too pragmatic to clash

by **Walter Hatch**
Times Olympia bureau

OLYMPIA — At the midpoint of this 60-day session, the two most powerful legislators in Washington staged a political show in the middle of the state Capitol building.

House Speaker Joe King, D-Vancouver, and Senate Majority Leader Jeannette Hayner, R-Walla Walla, told a flock of reporters Tuesday that the session was moving along briskly, smoothly, with little bickering or brawling between Democrats and Republicans. Like camp counselors at bedtime, they told what sounded like a fairy tale of productivity and cooperation



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ANALYSIS

beneath the marble dome.

"The Legislature is working better than a lot of people expected it to," said King. "We're moving forward on a bipartisan basis."

The cynics just snorted. After all, each house has handled only its own agenda, avoiding for the moment any showdowns between the Democrat-dominated House and the Republican-controlled Senate.

But the evidence suggests that, at least so far, King and Hayner may be right.

The Legislature *has* been productive. In the House, committees

Please see **TITANS** on B 2

King, Hayner fill the 'Gardner void'

TITANS

continued from B 1

have passed 507 bills. In the Senate, committees have churned out 454.

Lawmakers also have managed to get along with one another. Instead of holding press conferences to spew bombast and rhetoric, as is usually the case during legislative sessions, they have rolled up their sleeves and tried to find creative ways to solve sticky problems.

For example, Rep. Dennis Braddock, D-Bellingham, and Sen. Alex Deccio, R-Yakima, worked together to create an omnibus bill to help halt the spread of the deadly AIDS virus. In doing so, the two managed to isolate extremists on either side of the equation and defuse what could have been this session's most explosive issue.

All of this happy talk prompts a question: Why is this session threatening to become a smashing success?

Election-year politics has a lot to do with it. Both sides, Republicans and Democrats, want to emerge from the session with as few injuries as possible. They want to save themselves for an all-important brawl in the fall for control of the Legislature.

In addition, bipartisan cooperation has become *de rigueur*. In two one-day special sessions last year, lawmakers closed ranks to cope with a potentially disastrous court ruling on the state's business-and-occupation tax, a threatened takeover of The Boeing Co. and a Superfund initiative bedeviling business. Most of them liked the quick, clean results.

But the straight-shooting, non-nonsense nature of the two legislative leaders, King and Hayner, may have as much as anything to do with the surprising success of this session.

They have stepped into the void left by Gov. Booth Gardner, who so far has chosen to be a non-player. Unlike last year, when he set the Legislature's agenda by pushing bills to beef up education funding and revamp the state's welfare system, the governor this year has refused to join the battle over some of the heavyweight bills.

King, by contrast, has become the driving force behind legislation to nearly double the state minimum wage and put a lid on campaign contributions and expenditures. He has also emerged as champion of the deregulation of Pacific Northwest Bell.

Hayner, too, is pushing to allow police conducting drug investigations to secretly record private conversations without a judge's permission. And she has lined up behind a proposal to control the Legislature's craving to spend scarce tax dollars.

Philosophically, King and Hayner come from different worlds.

The son of a construction worker, a soldier in one of Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty programs, a man who likes to drink canned beer, King is liberal on most issues. The daughter of a businessman, a longtime member of a private country club, a woman who likes to wear pearls, Hayner is conservative on most issues.

But King, 42, and Hayner, 69, are soulmates in other important ways.

For one thing, both are fundamentally pragmatic.

Despite his liberal leanings, King opens his door to nearly all lobbyists — including business lobbyists. In fact, when he chaired the House Commerce and Labor Committee in 1983, he was known as "the sleaze king," a wheeler-dealer who aligned himself with gambling and fireworks lobbyists.

By leading the charge for other causes, such as a state health insurance plan for the poor, King has silenced some of his critics. But the teacher-turned-insurance salesman is still struggling to convince others that he cares about more than cutting deals.

"I like to get things done," he says, "but that doesn't mean I'm going to sacrifice all my values on the way."

Despite her conservative leanings, Hayner seems to pick political opposites — Lois North, now a King County Council member; Sue Gould, who recently ran for the Snohomish County Council — as people to get along with in Olympia. She seems to communicate as well, if not better, with the moderates and liberals in her caucus as she does with conservatives like Sen. Ellen Craswell, R-Bremerton.

The true test of Hayner's leadership, and the first sign of her pragmatism, came in 1981 as the state budget began to sink into a sea of red ink. She quickly acknowledged that the Legislature, even a GOP-controlled Legislature, would have to swallow hard and raise taxes.

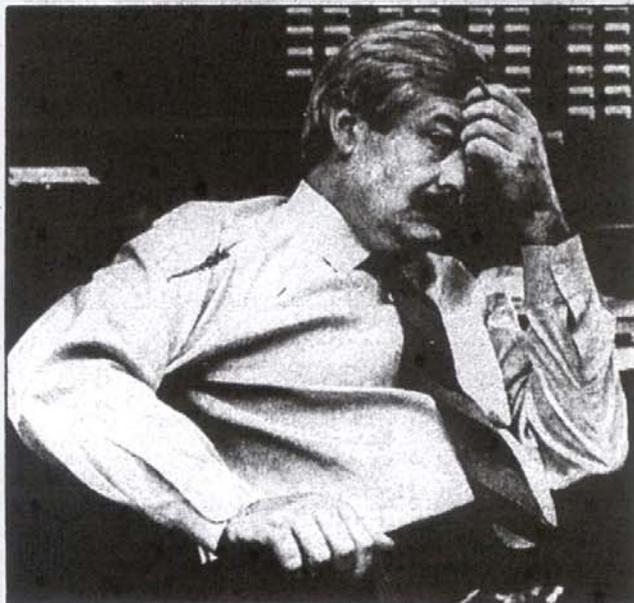
But Hayner couldn't persuade three conservative members of her caucus, including Craswell — to come along. So she had to go fishing for some Democrat votes.

Livid, Hayner moved immediately to dump Craswell as vice chair of the Senate Budget Committee. In fact, she ordered staff to white out the name of her stubborn Republican colleague from all the committee stationery.

Like King, who has chewed out caucus members in his office, the Senate GOP leader is tough. As one of only two women in her graduating class at the University of Oregon Law School, and as the first woman caucus leader in Olympia, she has acquired a steely resolve.

She has "spunk," according to Sen. Peter von Reichbauer, R-Tacoma. "She's made of iron," said another colleague.

Both leaders, who admit they are "process junkies," enjoy power. King, who likes to quote former Louisiana Gov. Huey Long, one of America's most demagogic leaders, readily admits he hankered to



Betty Udesen / Seattle Times

House Speaker Joe King struggles to convince others that he cares about more than cutting deals.

become speaker as soon as he entered the House in 1981.

"I looked around, sized it up and said to myself, 'That's the job for me,'" King recalled recently as he sat behind the wheel of a big black Chevrolet that looks like a limousine and accommodates his lanky 6-foot 5-inch frame.

But he is no despot. Neither is Hayner, who became the Senate's top Republican in a 1979 coup against an old-style "good ol' boy" leader. Both realize they must share power to wield power in this increasingly democratic institution.

Both have used a collegial style to hold their caucuses together. King's group has managed to stick to its plan to promote progressive legislation. Hayner's group has managed to stick to its plan to behave like statesmen.

"Jeannette does an incredibly good job of representing 25 very different people," said Sen. Emilio Cantu, R-Bellevue. "She listens to all of us."

Rep. Ruth Fisher, D-Tacoma, notes that King likes to take caucus members to lunch to talk about their pet peeves, goals or whatever might be on their minds. She says he has the qualities of a good parent: "He's firm, fair and friendly."

Neither leader cares much for, or feels very comfortable with, the media. They seem to view all the attention as a nuisance, a distraction from more important tasks of massaging egos, plotting moves and running the institution.

Last week, when he announced his support for the PNB bill, King attracted both the media's light and the wrath of some of his colleagues. The bill, which would allow the utility to set its own prices for some services, is opposed by both small business and consumer interests.

The mini-flap could be a sign



Betty Udesen / Seattle Times

Senate Majority Leader Jeannette Hayner says, "I don't like to be vindictive, but sometimes you just have to act."

of things to come.

As the session heats up, the solidarity within each caucus is bound to unravel some, and the good will between the two houses is bound to sour a bit.

This Wednesday, a group of budget experts will meet to estimate how much money the state will collect from taxpayers over the next 16 months. That estimate will determine how much the Legislature will have to spend on AIDS education, foster care, medical benefits for state employees and other critical programs.

Hard choices will follow. Hayner and fellow Republicans will have to decide how many of those needs they financially can afford to meet — or just as important, how many they politically can afford to ignore.

King and fellow Democrats will have to decide how much they are willing to offend the Washington Federation of State Employees, a big union and bigger campaign contributor.

"The real test is still to come," King admitted.