

Political games bring legislative pay hikes

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The political games played in the House, particularly by Rep. John Reardon, R-Boise, chairman of the House State Affairs Committee and House Majority Leader Walter E. Little, R-New Plymouth, brought about the 13.5 percent per year salary increase for the Idaho legislators. Tersely, it was shoddy Republican leadership and entirely unnecessary.

Democrats and a number of Republicans said they were incensed at the way Reardon and Little arrogantly attempted to ramrod through Senate Resolution 101, which would have rejected the recommended pay increase. Committee members said they were angered when the Senate-passed measure was put to the top of the Thursday's committee agenda and a similar House measure was shoved to the bottom.

The House measure, which had the support of many legislators in both the House and Senate, would have accepted the increased \$4 per day expenses but not the salary increase. For a 70-day session, this would have meant about \$300 more yearly for each legislator.

With tempers aroused and resentment at high pitch, the tight band of 20 Democrats joined with nine Republicans to vote against a resolution for suspending the rules to consider the Senate measure. The 41 votes in favor and 29 against fell six votes shy of the required two thirds.

Two East Idaho legislators figured in the row, Reps. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, and Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls. Hammond said both Republican and Democrats members were angered when Reardon cut off debate on a measure rejecting the proposed increases.

Hammond, a normally mild-manner lawmaker, said he wouldn't be surprised if the Democrats walked out and didn't come back. Kearnes, a

senior Republican and a committee chairman, also resented Reardon's clumsy actions. She walked out of the committee; remarking "I won't be a party to this." She even refused to attend a Republican Party caucus later.

The Legislature was working on a tight schedule Wednesday because action was required by Wednesday midnight, the 25th day of the Legislature by which the Idaho Constitution specifies that the legislature must reject or reduce compensation. Otherwise, the recommendations of the Citizens Commission on Legislative Compensation goes into effect — and it did.

The yearly salary for legislators now goes from \$3,000 to \$4,200 and the expenses from \$40 to \$44 per day, while the Legislature is in session. In round figures for the two year period, the salary and expenses are increased from \$11,500 to \$14,560 or half that for one year.

Others also blame Little for what they termed his heavy-handed tactics in subverting the committee process.

Most who closely observe the Legislature, feel the legislators, most of them hard workers, deserve a pay raise.

Idaho is one of only 12 states which pays its legislators less than \$10,000 for two years, according to a compilation made by the Council of State Government for 1977-78. In fact, Idaho rates 41st of the 50 states.

Most members of the Greater Idaho Falls Chamber of Commerce agreed the legislative pay raise is deserved, but they question the way it was handled. This writer has always backed a better pay scale, in hopes it might upgrade competition for the Legislature, if nothing else.

The worst effect is the timing, coming when there is a 1 percent tax limitation syndrome which favors cutbacks, and at the least no increases in salaries and expenses. The guideline for salary hikes is 7

percent, as recommended by President Carter to curb inflation.

The Legislature is now in an uncomfortable position to ask public employees and state agencies for cutbacks or modest increases when it has accepted the 13.5 percent per year hike.

House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, wryly remarked at a chamber discussion this week that the legislators are not laughing.

During the reorganization sessions in early December there was a strong feeling to reject the recommended legislators increases. It also fell victim to parliamentary hassle when the Senate Republican Democratic leadership engaged in a squabble on the reduction of attaches.

A survey indicated that most legislators secretly want the increase but are fearful of public reaction.

Yet, Idaho people don't expect their legislators to serve at a financial loss. This latest increase may enable them at least to serve without need of digging in their own pockets.

There may be reactions, but frankly the pay raise is deserved.