

Democrats to discuss 1984 legislation, says Hammond

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House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, said Tuesday the House Democrat leadership likely will call a series of three regional meetings to plan strategies for the 1984 Legislature.

What increased funding can be found for education will be the prime subject, he said.

Hammond said he is accepting the suggestion of Republican House Speaker Tom W. Stivers to hold such meetings among the House Democrats, much as the Republicans are doing, to reach consensus on major issues the coming year.

One of these Republican meetings was held in Idaho Falls Thursday.

"The House speaker told me the Republicans are holding such meetings and I have a suspicion the Democrats can do likewise," said Hammond.

He said he will talk with the two other members of the House minority leadership, Assistant Minority Leader Louis J. Horvath, D-Pinehurst, and Minority Caucus Chairman Dwight W. Horsch, D-Aberdeen, to arrange such meetings later this summer.

Hammond said the meetings likely will take place in Pocatello, Lewiston and Coeur d'Alene but the dates remain to be fixed.

Legislative Council funds are being used to pay travel costs.

Hammond said he is not personally informed on how much state surplus money will be available but that Stivers has said \$40 million to \$50 million is anticipated in surplus. Of this, about two-thirds, or about \$25 million to \$30 million, can be earmarked for public schools, he added.

"Speaker Stivers has publicized these figures and I hope he is right," said Hammond in a telephone interview with The Post-Register. "However, this needs to be proven and we will see what we have at the start of the next session in January. It still is speculative."

"I hope public schools can get this money. We have some \$19 million that was available and Gov. John V. Evans had recommended some of this be appropriated but the House Republicans defeated this."

"I spoke on the House floor the last session and warned if we did not use some of this anticipated surplus it would trigger a property tax increase and that's exactly what is happening today."

Hammond pointed out records show some 36 school districts plan to pass levies totaling close to \$30 million this year, nearly four times the \$8 million asked by 30 school districts last year.



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portionment, water rights, energy plan, and tax structure, Hammond said.

Hammond said it appears the reapportionment lawsuit likely won't be settled until next year. He noted there is a threat by a north Idaho judge to call a special election for this fall but appeals, possible trial and other legal delays will make possibility of such an election remote.

"In fact," said Hammond, "In view of the complex litigation I believe we will be lucky to settle the

issue in time for the 1984 elections."

He lamented Senate Bill 1189 to subordinate Idaho Power Co. water rights to stream flows failed in the Senate by a single vote, 17-18, in the last session.

All six east Idaho senators voted in favor but it did not reach the House.

"It is imperative we pass this legislation this coming year," said Hammond.