

Legislative leaders offbase attacking power commissions

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The recent actions of the Idaho Legislature's top leaders, Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, in planning restrictive actions against two power commissions who favor the people over the vested power interests are rather interesting.

Budge has always shown his warm sympathy for the Idaho Power Co. and other private utilities in legislative actions but why Olmstead, now a leading gubernatorial candidate, should take such a strong stand at this time, is perplexing and would appear ill-advised.

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Last month, Budge advocated the replacement of Idaho's two representatives to the Pacific Northwest Electrical Power and Conservation Planning Council. Last week at Pocatello, Olmstead was quoted as saying he and Budge are likely to form a legislative committee to review and define the future role of the Idaho Public Utilities Commission because he felt it is getting too powerful.

The charges by Olmstead needs examining.

The IPUC must follow the laws and certain guidelines in its decision-making. Any deviations could be successfully challenged in court.

Olmstead charges Idaho laws did not give the IPUC authority for social engineering, growth management and economic policy. He also criticizes the inverted rate structure he says hits productivity to major users of electricity, such as irrigators, business and industry.

The response comes from a Republican and fellow townsman, Richard High, who is a new member of the IPUC, highly respected former state senator and veteran former chairman of the Joint

Finance Appropriations Committee.

High said he didn't believe the "IPUC and the legislative leadership had a disagreement. I think we in IPUC are in error in not communicating on things we are doing."

He said then "we are applying in fact the cost of service economics to our rate structure in a way we hope will give a maximum degree of fairness to all customers," in answering to Olmstead's inverted rate criticism.

High said the inverted rate structure is based on the current cost of new electrical generation, taking in the "cause and effect and applying it to the rate structure."

He then added this is becoming the dominant rate structure method, not only in Idaho but in other states.

High said the IPUC seeks a fair and equitable course, further pointing out the BPA costs will bring lower costs, such as witnessed by the Utah Power and Light Company's recent 38 percent reduction to customers.

High said further cuts also may be expected while the preferred customers, such as the City of Idaho Falls, can anticipate higher costs to more evenly balance the power consumer rate structure for all consumers in the Pacific Northwest.

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The IPUC under previous Idaho Republican administrations was virtually a tool of private utilities. Records show that what these public utilities wanted in the way of rate increases they invariably got. It was only after Andrus entered the state executive office that the IPUC became more truly a voice for the people.



Richard High

The former chairman, Bob Lenaghan, was altogether too outspoken and combative. He thus failed to win confirmation in his second term. However, his replacement, Perry Swisher, a former legislator and past Pocatello and Lewiston newspaper, is just as capable and was confirmed unanimously in 1980. The other members are Conley Ward, an astute Boise attorney, who was confirmed by only a single vote, and High, confirmed unanimously to replace the retiring Ralph Wickberg this year.

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Budge's real reasons for ousting the two Idaho representatives to the Pacific Northwest Council, Robert Saxvik and Chris Carlson, of course, are not qualifications but philosophy.

Both Saxvik and Carlson have long and distinguished public records. Saxvik has been a state senator and chief administrative assistant several years for both Govs. Cecil D. Andrus and John V. Evans. Carlson has been press secretary for Andrus while he served both as governor and secretary of interior but he also was Andrus' right hand man in managing many facets of the interior department, including the power structure.

Budges real reasons are the fact that Saxvik and Carlson likely will come down more on the side of the people, rather than private utilities, a situation that Budge's voting record shows he does not like.

Budge wields considerable power as the Senate leader in the confirmation battle shaping up in the 1982 session. Budge and other Republicans contend a Republican should be named, rather than two Democrats. This likely is what the fuss is all about—to get a compromise to confirm Saxvik but to name a Republican to replace Carlson.

But for Olmstead to attack the IPUC, which has marked up an exceptional record in behalf of the consumers, could be not only counter productive but self defeating.