

Olmstead will back sales tax hike if needed

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House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, said he would favor a sales tax increase, rather than shift the burden of public school funding back to the property tax, and if the Legislature cannot balance the budget by being conservative.

Olmstead said he would favor allowing growth and an inflation factor added to the budget freeze to further implement the 1 Percent Tax Initiative.

Olmstead also gave his support to tax relief, such as for property tax, continuance of senior citizens circuit breaker, continuance of home exemption and others.

"Yes, yes," he replied in answer to a Post-Register questionnaire on whether he would favor tax relief, adding "and possibly provide investment tax credit

and increase in grocery credit allowance."

Olmstead underscored a conservative approach, saying there should be no new state programs.

"Substantial cuts on state programs are in order and I have them identified along with price tags," he said. "Any supplementals can come from water pollution control funds as the governor has suggested."

On other issues, he said he supports increased highway funding, such as for the state gas tax, vehicle registration and others; backs a hike in student fees and also would eliminate the academic programs at Lewis-Clark State College, which would bring about a \$2.7 million savings.

Olmstead said it would be desirable to consolidate school districts but it is

always unpopular.

The House speaker said "yes and no" concerning giving cities more home rule, such as local option tax powers and more powers for planning, zoning and reopening budgets, indicating he would have to see what such proposals contain before committing himself.

He opposes a full-fledged Department of Energy but might favor some other departmental changes, such as consolidations of departments and bureaus.

On other matters, he said he favored the Sagebrush Rebellion, and modest increases in Fish and Game Department license fees and rules changes.

He opposes more licensing for day care centers, shelter homes and others, adding "we have too many regulations now."

Olmstead said he has an open mind

and would need to see legislation regarding right-to-work laws, compulsory arbitrations and other union regulations.

He also said he would need to see any proposed changes on election laws and convention party systems before deciding what to do.

Olmstead has served four two-year terms and was re-elected in November without opposition.

He won the House speakership in a brisk contest with Majority Leader Walter E. Litte, R-New Plymouth, in the 45th session and has presided over the House in the last two sessions.

He is opposed by a right winger, Rep. Dan Emery, R-Boise, a former Democrat, for the speakership this year but most observers and legislators says he will win re-election handily in the reorganization session Thursday.



Post-Register photo

Ready with gavel

HOUSE SPEAKER Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, is shown as the speaker's rostrum in the Idaho House of Representatives during the 1980 session. He is a candidate for re-election to the speakership at the Legislative reorganization session Thursday. He says he backs a sales tax if it is critically needed.