

Jones foresees few changes in attorney general office

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Jim Jones, the low key Jerome attorney who won two tight election races, Friday disclosed there will be few changes in how the attorney general's office will function the next four years.

In fact, Jones intends to keep most of the present staff and follow much the policies of his predecessor, Attorney General David H. Leroy, but he admits his style is less flamboyant.

For Jones, it has been a crowning success to public office after losing two fairly close primary election contests to U.S. Rep. George V. Hansen, in 1978 and 1980. He then switched to the attorney general contest this year, beating Ada County Prosecutor Jim Harris first in the Republican primary and then vanquishing Democrat J. D. Williams, Preston, in the general.

Perhaps counting all four election attempts, Jones must have spend more than a quarter of million dollars, including \$124,000 in his 1982 races. This was about twice what his Democratic rival expended, according to the secretary of state records.

Even Jones said it was expensive and that his father told him that the "well had run about dry" for election campaign spending.

It does show Jones is politically ambitious; he did campaign vigorously for all four elections.

After interviews with the present staff, Jones said he has rehired all who wanted to stay. Only three opted to leave, Mike Kennedy, formerly of Rexburg, who accepted the magistrate appointment in Rigby; and John Sutton and Don Olowinski, who both went into private practice.

Jones even kept Larry Harvey as the chief deputy but did bring his secretary, Trisha Griffith. Leroy's private secretary, Lois Hurlless, continues in the same capacity with Jones.

Where Leroy used a rather bombastic style, Jones is soft-spoken but this can be misleading as he is also effective.

"It looks like all of the lawyers are doing a good job in the office and it helps to keep a continuity in the office," said Jones.

Jones said he is interviewing applicants for the three vacant positions.

"The transfer of duties from Mr. Leroy has been going smoothly," said Jones, who has been in the attorney general office much of the past two weeks to learn the ropes.

He noted the attorney general office has the largest legal staff in the state at 55, of which 38 are all in state agencies.

Jones said he plans to submit a bill for consoli-



Jim Jones

dation to get all state-paid lawyers under the attorney general office.

"I have discussed this with Governor Evans and he indicated there might be some problems but I believe I can work with him and the department heads," said Jones. "While there might be some objections I think we can make a strong effort to reach an agreement."

Jones is less partisan and more of a moderate than Leroy and he just might be able to work better with Evans and other Democrats in state office. Bluntly put, they feel they may be able to trust him.

Jones pointed out Leroy had said a consolidation could save between \$150,000 to \$200,000 per year.

He said the advantage of bringing all state attorneys under his office is more flexibility. If there is an overload in one field it can be shifted to other areas where there is less demand for legal service.

At present, many state agencies hire special attorneys on a contract basis.

Jones said there is not a great deal of demand for attorneys by state agencies for special assignment and he estimates only a few lawyers would be transferred to his office.

All of the state attorneys are based in Boise except for one each in Idaho Falls, Twin Falls and Coeur d'Alene.

Democratic governors and other high Democrats said they have always feared placing all of the state attorneys in control of a Republican attorney general because it would give the Republicans more political power to use against them. Mainly because of this, Evans has vetoed such consolidation bills.

However, Jones who apparently has less political ambition than his Republican predecessors might convince Evans to approve a measure, especially if it contains some compromise features.

Jones also said he has a legislative package on the parole system that would require the state parole commission to get the commitments of the prosecutor in the case on parole hearings and also to require final approval of the governor on sentence commutation to give more responsiveness.

He pointed out the State Parole Commission would still work up the case but the governor would have the final say.

He said he also has another bill that would require drug pushers to serve at least a third of their sentence before eligible for parole.

"At present, drug pushers don't have to serve any particular time," said Jones.

Another measure he is drafting is to allow the court to award attorney fees to the winning party in civil suits.

"I think this would cut down frivolous cases and speed up the judicial process" said Jones.

Jones said he is moving from Jerome to Boise with his wife and 5-year-old daughter.

"I'm thrilled over the victory," he said. "It has been a long hard fight."