

Legislators force owners to pay more property tax

By BEN J. PLASTINO

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Idaho legislators, particularly the Republican leadership, boast they cut state appropriations to the bone but what they did actually was to shift the tax burden to the local level, particularly school districts.

Their thrust was something like that on the national level where the Reagan administration has cut many of the human service programs but by doing so shifted the burden to the states.

Even though Reagan has slashed people's programs his fiscal policy is such that his administration has the largest deficit and federal debt in the nation's history.

Because of the Legislature's past actions, Idaho school districts are now passing override levies double or triple the amounts of recent years.

A report from the state school superintendent's office shows that because of legislative deficiency, local school districts have been forced to vote for override levies that greatly boost property tax.

The report Friday by Mrs. Helen Werner, assistant school superintendent, shows that all 23 school districts passed levies. Shoshone School District patrons rejected a levy the first time but pushed it over the second attempt.

Mrs. Werner's report shows that the 23 school districts passed levies amounting to \$11,985,185 but 13 others are contemplating voting this spring for override levies totaling \$15 million. That means 36 school districts will need to pass levies totaling nearly \$30 million.



Helen Werner

Politics

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In eastern Idaho, Idaho Falls School District 91 passed an override levy for \$1,794,000. This was a substantial hike over the \$1,469,000 in 1982 and \$1,360,000 in 1981, pointed out Supt. Jerry Jacobson.

Fremont School District 251 is planning to vote on one this spring for \$82,000. Madison School District 321 is also considering a levy but has not yet decided on the amount or date.

The total of nearly \$30 million in override levies this spring by at least 36 school districts contrasts with 30 districts approving \$8,029,300 for 1982-83, 37 for \$11,503,300 in 1981-82 and 36 for \$9,317,551 in 1980-81.

In other words, school districts are voting double or triple the amount of override levies than they have done in the past. It also means that a third of the 115 school districts are voting override levies.

A newcomer to the override levy picture is Boise independent school district which has not had to do this in the past because of its charter status. This year, the school district felt it had to go to its patrons to get approval and it passed a levy for \$2,948,000.

Mrs. Werner noted that unlike many states which report less public school children, Idaho has continued to consistently show slight enrollment increases year after year.

The enrollment this year hiked by about 1,300 students to a total of 205,824. She said it appears

there are considerably more families but they are having less children, a trend which apparently is nationwide.

The Legislature voted \$215 million for public schools for fiscal 1984, exactly the same for this current fiscal year ending June 30. This amount, however, will not go near as far because of inflation, need for salary increases, and higher enrollment.

As observed in a recent political column, the education funding became almost a partisan issue in the last Legislature and promises to continue that way for 1984. The voting showed all of the 33 Idaho Democratic legislators voted for more funding but all of the 82 Republicans except nine favored no more funding than this year and a few even wanted less. These included two from east Idaho, Reps. Ray E. Infanger, R-Salmon, and JoAn Wood, R-Rigby.

The legislators boast they voted for the largest tax increase in history at \$138.4 million. Most of this hike, however, is borne by the average taxpayer in the form of a 1.5 cent sales tax increase, and hikes in the state gas tax.

Yet, many corporate leaders have told the legislators they did not mind paying for their fair share to help education.

It's ironical that the Idaho legislators who vowed they would protect the property tax actually did the opposite. By their stingy appropriation for education, most property owners in Idaho will now pay far more property taxes the coming year.