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The political pulse

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Statehouse sidelights . . .

Purce seeks equality in funding of DHW

By BEN J. PLASTINO
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BOISE — Dr. Les Purce, director of the Department of Health and Welfare, expects tight funding from the Idaho Legislature, but he wants to make certain his department gets equitable treatment.

"At this point," he said in a Post-Register interview in Boise, "it is apparent we will have to abide with the revenue projection."

Purce observed most key legislators figure a budget of \$460 million, compared with \$422 million for the current fiscal year end June 30.

He added he has asked for a 13 percent increase, or \$73 million from the general fund for fiscal year 1983 beginning July 1, compared with \$64 million the current 1982 fiscal year ending June 30.

Purce said education will get the largest share with about 80 percent of the funding but his department expects to receive about 15 percent.

Purce said one of his greatest worries is to get legislative funding to replenish anticipated losses from federal block grants.

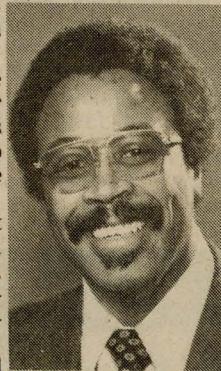
"We are asking replacement of a little under \$2 million," said Purce.

Purce estimated the block grant loss at something near \$5 million.

He said low income groups will hurt the most.

Purce said his problem is for health programs to be flexible to the loss of federal money.

"As we reduce dollars we must try to get the



Les Purce

largest part of our funding where the population is located," he said. "At the same time we must give services in rural areas.

He said the seven regional staffs have been trimmed to a "skeletal level" but that it appears to be working.

"The staff has pulled together and it's my priorities for the staff to make the programs work on policies. All of the regional managers are doing fine to give the utmost service with the funds available.

"I think this is going to be a tight year. We must be frugal with what we do. I'm pushing for equity in all programs."

Purce appeared before the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee to announce the department will put federal grant funds up for competitive bidding in an attempt to fairly distribute the cut federal funds earmarked for low-income people and health programs.

He said he has decided to require local governments, community action agencies, migrant councils and other groups which want to provide services for the poor to bid for the federal cash.

"There just is not going to be a lot of money around," he said.

Purce, representatives of the state's six community action agencies, Idaho Migrant Council, and the Idaho Hunger Action Council appeared before the committee.

Federal statutes require legislatures to hold hearings on Preventive Health; Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Mental Health, and Community Service block grants before receiving federal funds.

Purce received backing for his competitive-bidding approach from witnesses at the hearing.

Spokesmen for the community action agencies said they believe their groups would end up receiving the bids because they have a track record of serving the poor in a more cost-efficient manner.