

The Post-Register

The political pulse

A-12

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Sunday, August 9, 1981

Legislative limelights...

Low key Legislature anticipated for 1982

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

Statements by one of the leading Idaho Legislature leaders when he was here the past week generally confirms the 1982 session will be no better and could be worse than the lack lustre edition in 1981.

Sen. Mike P. Mitchell, D-Lewiston, Senate assistant minority leader, is viewed by his colleagues as one of the astute legislators who takes a strong advocacy minority role and whose views are highly respected.

Although labeled as a liberal, Mitchell, 56, is realistic and often takes conservative stances on many issues, at times in conflict with Democratic Gov. John V. Evans.

Mitchell was in Idaho Falls to speak to the Rotary Club, primarily on legislative financing and reapportionment, Idaho prison system and to survey his chances of election if he were to enter the lieutenant governor race.

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Mitchell agreed wholly with the Republican leadership that there will be no dramatic increase in state governmental funding for fiscal 1982 and little chance for supplemental appropriations above the proposed \$420 million budget, despite the governor's recommendations for \$440 million.

Mitchell is the ranking minority member of the Senate Finance Committee and is considered the leader of the more moderate factions that want more funding for people's programs. As such, he took the leading part in the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee deliberations in opposing the budget-slashing tactics led by Sen. Dean Van Engelen, R-Burley. With the so-called "dirty dozen" in firm control, Mitchell was generally on the losing end but he did succeed in getting more money for some human service programs by his persistent arguments.

Mitchell, a seventh-term legislators and un-

opposed in recent years, is a native Idahoan, and owned a successful beer distributing business but discarded this a couple years ago in favor of serving as a financial consultant to help establish banks in North Idaho.

Mitchell said he was neither encouraged or discouraged in his current survey on his chances for lieutenant governor. However, he left the definite impression he will not seek the position but rather will go for re-election where he is considered a cinch.

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Mitchell also agrees with such leaders as House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls; Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt and Senate President Pro tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, there are no chances for a tax increase in any field, be it sales, income, and certainly property. On the contrary, there likely will be serious attempts for more tax relief, even though the state is financially strapped, is near the bottom of the list of states in tax loads, and will be further hit by reduced allocations of federal funds.

Mitchell noted there is only a \$1.7 million surplus carried over from the past fiscal year and whether there is an economic upturn is uncertain.

Mitchell points out 1982 is a political year when all legislator positions are up for grabs. As such, they are not likely to impair their chances for slapping on any tax increase whatsoever.

A recent poll conducted by the National Federation of Independent Businessmen showed a 2-1 majority against a 1 cent sales tax hike, or 30 percent in favor, 62 percent against and 8 percent undecided.

Mitchell expressed hope that perhaps a severance tax could be imposed that would bring substantial revenues but the mining and forest industries have shown they have powerful lobbies to thwart this.

The Post-Register

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D-8

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, August 5, 1981

Legislative limelights...

Reapportionment session was costly, fruitless

By BEN J. PLASTINO
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What good Gov. John V. Evans' veto of legislative reapportionment will do is uncertain but the 15-day special session was an excellent example of legislative exercise in futility.

It was required by law to be accomplished. Other states for the most part are having as much, and in many cases, more trouble in legislative and congressional reapportionment. This is especially true in many states that have had losses or sharp gains in population.

It's painfully obvious that the vast majority of people were little interested in reapportionment, most of them mainly concerned with the fact state money was being spent for something they would get little benefit and would hardly change their style of voting.

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Most legislators following the gubernatorial veto last week indicate there will be little changes in reapportionment from what they approved. Even many Democrats who voted against the reapportionment did so out of party loyalty but the changes in legislative boundaries will not adversely affect the majority of them.

The reapportionment bill passed the House 50-20 and the Senate 23-12, with the Democrats in opposition, indicating the governor will have a difficult time bringing about many changes.

The main contention centers on Legislative District 33 where Republican Power County was added to Oneida and south Bannock. The governor and Democrats charge this was gerrymandering against Sen. Bert Marley, D-McCammon, but this is only one district in 35. The Democrat charge is questionable because

Sen. Chick Bilyeu, D-Pocatello, in District 35, has done well in Power County when it was in his district. There is no reason Marley couldn't do as well if he campaigned strenuously.

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The Republican controlled Legislature could have gone much stronger by virtually eliminating Legislative District 34, made up primarily of Pocatello, which only had some 17,000 population, the lowest of any district. Of course, the Republicans knew this would not have been accepted. As a result, it was necessary to shift population from the Upper Snake River Valley counties, primarily Bingham, to make up the shortages in Bannock and southeast counties.

There is also cause for complaints that instead of giving Boise a legislative district outright, the legislators chose to include Ada County into three outlying rural districts. This also has dangers for the Republicans because Ada County residents could oust some rural Republican incumbents now representing Gem, Boise, Valley and Owyhee counties.

As observed earlier, most of the legislators had little to do while the leadership and regional and group chairmen pored over charts and precinct and legislative figures.

The cost is estimated at about \$10,000 a day, or some \$150,000 for the 15 days. They did draft a basic plan which won't be changed much and did a good job in congressional reapportionment by simply shifting some 21,500 in Boise from the 1st to the 2nd congressional district.

This brings up the question of why the reapportionment couldn't have been done in the regular session next winter. The gubernatorial veto now makes this a necessity which indicates the special session may have been unnecessary in the first place.