

The Post-Register

The political pulse

D-8

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, August 5, 1981

Legislative limelights...

Reapportion session was costly, fruitless

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

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.

* * *

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.

* * *

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 poured 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.

81