

The Post-Register

The political pulse

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, February 18, 1981

Section D

Legislative limelights...

46th Idaho Legislature progress above normal

BY BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

BOISE — The 46th Idaho Legislature's progress appears slightly ahead of normal but faces the hurdle of settling the public employee salary increase problem before it can go ahead with other business.

The House passed three resolutions last week intended to give the employees an 8 percent salary raise, plus 2 percent merit hike, but with only a \$4 million funding.

This, however, has met the objections of the Senate Republican leaders who feel the 6.5 percent jump, plus 1 percent merit pay boost, is enough. This is close to the figures recommended by Gov. John V. Evans.

Both the Senate and House figures, however, would cause the termination of public employees, the figures estimated from 350 to 1,000, depending who is making the estimates.

* * *

Both the Senate and House Republican leaders are not honest with themselves because the \$4 million funding is far from adequate for the 13,000 employees. It is a backdoor approach to cutting the employees.

Steve Swadley, executive director of the Idaho Public Employee Association, estimated the House figures would lop off between 700 and 1,000

employees, while those of the Senate likely would amount to half the number. He said it would take \$15.5 million to fund the public employee increase, or \$11.5 million short of what the House has asked.

Legislative leaders contend there are at least 250 existing vacancies and the impact would not be that great. Some insist there would need to be only a few employees terminated, that natural attrition from retirement and those voluntarily leaving jobs would account for most of the reduction.

* * *

The charge by House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, that the House Republican leaders took an arrogant approach in ramming through three resolutions for the public employee salary increase carries considerable merit. Hammond contends the resolutions were placed on the lawmaker's desk only a few minutes before the voting and only a select few—meaning the Republican leaders—knew about it.

Why the Republicans take such an antagonistic approach to state public employees, who in most cases are loyal and dedicated, has been puzzling. It appears so unnecessary. For the most part they are not of that strong partisan nature but the Republicans are forcing them to the Democratic fold whether they want to go there or not.

Kearnes sees rough times for relief cases

Ad Feb. 18, 1981

BY BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

BOISE — State Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the House Health and Welfare Committee, doesn't see any good news for the thousands on relief and who are recipients on the Department of Health and Welfare programs.

Mrs. Kearnes, known throughout the State Legislature as the champion for people programs — those for people on welfare and health care rolls — said a so-called CAVE committee appointed by House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, has been created to look at the Department of Health and Welfare.

She said in a Post-Register interview this committee headed by Rep. Jack Kennevik, R-Boise, has come up with a number of recommendations to make it even tougher for welfare and health clients.

One of its recommendations is to consolidate the

public health districts with the DHW.

She said a bill sponsored by Rep. Morgan Munger, R-Ola, calling for a year's moratorium on Public Health Districts is held in her desk. She said it likely will stay there unless there is a demand for action by some legislator, although she does not foresee that.

Munger underwent a kidney stone operation 10 days ago but expects to return to the Legislature this week.

"Such a bill," said Mrs. Kearnes, "would kill the health districts because if they are closed for a year it is unlikely they could be re-established."

Mrs. Kearnes said there is a feeling around the Legislature that if there are any cuts they should take place in DHW.

She hastened to point out that many forget DHW is funded two thirds by the federal government.

"It means that for every dollar the state fails to appropriate, it loses \$2 in federal money," said Mrs.

Kearnes. "We should be careful on what we cut."

Mrs. Kearnes said she is more worried about what takes place on the federal government level in the field of welfare and relief. A cutback on the national level could adversely affect the state programs so that could bring suffering to many people.

"The national laws have much to do with the average person on welfare," she said. "The ones who are cut and who suffer most are the sick, blind, old and the crippled children. These are the people who can't afford the reductions."

Mrs. Kearnes noted the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee failed to give supplemental funds for the Aid to Dependent Children program. As a result, there will be further cuts starting next month with a mother and two children to get only \$240 month.