East Idaho fares well in Idaho Legislature leadership

The Post-Register
The political pulse
Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, Dec. 10, 1980 Section D

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East Idaho legislators grabbed a number of influential positions as result of the reorganization session last week at Boise.

The most significant was the elevation of two House members to leadership; Rep. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, as House minority leader, and Rep. Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot, as the House assistant majority leader.

Over in the Senate, Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackoot, was nosed out of leadership by Sen. Mike Mitchell, D-Lewiston, after the two were tied 6-6 for minority party caucus chairman but lost on flip of the coin. Merrill had served in that capacity the past biennium.

In the Senate, two East Idahoans gained committee chairmanships, Sen. Mark Ricks, R-Rexburg, was chosed to succeed former Sen. Larry Craig, now a congressman, as chairman of the Senate Commerce and Labor Committee, while Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, replaced Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, as head of the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee. Watkins opted to take over as chaiman of the more prestigious Local Goverment and Taxation Committee in place of Sen. Edith Klein, R-Boise, who chose to return to chairmanship of the Senate Judicary Committee.

Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, retains chairmanship of the Senate Resources and Conservation Committee.

It means of nine Senate standing committees, East Idahoans are chairmen of four.

The entire Senate Republican leadership of the 45th Legislature, or 1979-80 sessions, were re-elected without opposition. They were Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs; Majority Leader James Risch, R-Boise; Assistant Majority Leader J. Wilson Steen, R-Glenns Ferry; and Caucus Chairman Walter E. Yarbrough, R-Grand View.

Among the Democrats, Sen. Ron Twilegar, D-Boise, was unopposed for minority leader to succeed Sen. Cy Chase, D-St. Maries, who did not seek re-election; and Sen. Kermit Kiebert, D-Hope, was re-elected assistant minority leader without opposition. Mitchell won the caucus chairmanship in the flip of the coin over Merrill.

Crystal and Merrill also were named to the key Senate Finance Committee, along with Sen. Ken Bradshaw, R-Wendell. Although Mitchell is in leadersip, he will continue on the Finance Committee.

The new East Idaho senator, Sen. William Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, who defeated the re-election attempt of Sen. Richard A. Egbert, was named to the Resources and Conservation, and Transportation Comittees. Other East Idaho senators retain their previous committee positions.

Over in the House, retaining chairmanships were Reps. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, Health and Welfare; John O. Sessions, Transportation; and Kurt L. Johnson, Education.

Rep. Ray E. Infanger lost his temporary chairmanship of the all-powerful Appropriation Committee, when he bet on the wrong horse in backing Rep. Dan Emery, R-Boise, for speakership. As a result, the winner, House Speaker Ralpgh Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, named Rep. Kitty Gurnsey, R-Boise, as the new chairman. Infanger had been appointed the chairman for the remainer of 1980 after Rep. Doyle C.Miner, R-Boise, resigned in July to take over as director of the Board of Pharmacy at Boise.

Infanger said he had no animosity on his part toward the speaker.

"The state is the most important thing, the work that we're engaged in," he said. "We have no right to let our misunderstandings interfere with that operation."

Infanger said he was disappointed but would continue his duties.

Of the 13 standing House committees, East Idahoans head three which is about proportionate to the state population.

Behind the scenes reports indicate Olmstead vanquished Emery by 2-1 margin, Rep. Walter E.Little, R-New Plymouth, defeated Rep. Jack Kennevick, R-Boise, by two votes after Rep. Gordon Hollifield, R-Jerome, was eliminated on the first ballot; Young walloped a right winger, Rep. Gene Winchester, R-Kuna, by more than 2-1, for assistant majority leader; and Rep.Bud Lewis, R-St.Maries, also trounced Rep. Dan Kelley, R-Mountain Home, by more than 2-1 to retain his position as caucus chairman.

In the final balloting it means the House Republican leadership stays the same as in the last biennium except for Young replacing Kennevick as assistant majority leader.

Among the Democrats, Hammond ousted Rep. Patricia McDermott, D-Pocatello, by two votes to regain his position as House minority leader. He thus reversed the results of 1974 when Miss McDermott defeated Hammond. Hammond had served as assistant minority leader in the 1971-72 sessions and minority leader in the 1973-74 sessions.

Rep. Lou Horvath, D-Pinehurst, was unopposed for assistant minority leader to replace Rep. Ron Harlow, D-Lewiston, who did not seek re-election; and Rep. Marion Davidson, D-Bonners Ferry, retained his position as minority caucus chairman, defeating the challenge of Rep. Harold Reid, D-Craigmont.

Hammond, elated over his return to leadership role, in a Post-Register interview Tuesday, said, "My only hope is to work in a pleasing way with the other legislators to help the state.

"I hope people will stay in good humor and avoid bitter infighting and avoid the political harranges.

"I think if we just hold down we can all work together, do what is needed to get done, and then go home."

Hammond said the biggest problem is to properly implement the 1 Percent Tax Initiative so that it will not bring a hardship to the property owners.

All of the incumbents were assigned to their past committees. Of the new members, Rep. Martin Trillhaase, R-Idaho Falls, was assigned to the Printing, Business, and Resources and Conservation committees; and Rep. Rich Orme, R-St. Anthony, was selected to Health and Welfare, Education, and Resources and Conservation committees.