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The political pulse

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The 1982 Idaho Legislature. . .

Legislative revamping brings mixed reaction

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the ninth in a series of 16 articles giving the views of east Idaho legislators and the leadership on the salient issues shaping up for the coming session. This one deals on the legislative reapportionment.)

By BEN J. PLASTINO
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Most Republican legislators believed the legislative reapportionment plan approved by the Legislature in the July special session but vetoed by Democratic Gov. John V. Evans was satisfactory.

However, a number of the lawmakers object to the way Bingham County was treated, even though numerically it was almost perfect to the average of 26,963. Especially drawing sharp protests were placing the city of Shelley into two separate legislative districts.

Many east Idaho legislators pointed out that all six of the legislative districts in east Idaho were almost perfect, needing principally only some minor boundary reshuffling within the City of Idaho Falls to reach equality.

However, the Twin Falls area legislators wielded the most influential voice to draw on population in legislative districts in the southeast so that they would not need to drastically change their own boundaries. This brought a domino effect to shift boundary lines further west and dislocated all of the east Idaho districts.

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House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, said he felt it was gerrymandering to include District 33, extending from Oneida though south Bannock to Power county, to protect Republican incumbents. He also is dissatisfied with what he felt was unnecessary juggling of boundary lines in east Idaho districts, particularly in Bingham County.

The only other Democratic legislator in the east Idaho delegation, Sen. Israel Merrill, also branded as wrong the splitting in half of the Snake River School District, Blackfoot schools and Shelley schools, including the city of Shelley, into different legislative districts.

He pointed out the Supreme Court said "integrity of communities must be maintained," and this was not done in Bingham County.

The Republican legislators in District 29 which includes the central section of Idaho Falls and Shelley, also object to splitting the city and school district of Shelley. They are Sen. Dane Watkins, and Reps. Elaine Kearnes and Gary L. Paxman. They said they would fight to reverse the original proposal.

Paxman said he is working with the Shelley mayor and City Council in an effort to avoid dividing Shelley.

Another Bingham legislator, Assistant Majority Leader Darwin L. Young, expressed sentiment for a more equitable Bingham reapportionment.

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The legislator who likely wielded the biggest club in approving the legislative apportionment, House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, remarked as could be expected, "a good plan was presented." However, Olmstead knew he was going to run for govenor and did not take as intensive reapportionment role as some of his Twin Falls area colleagues. This appeared an obvious effort to avoid political enmity.

Sen. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, who probably took the most leading role in the reapportionment process, said he felt "the plan basically was pretty good but it could stand some fine tuning."

"I have what I call Plan II which is a little more numerically perfect and would be much better, particularly for Bonneville, Bingham and Jefferson counties," said Ricks.

Even Rep. Wayne E.Tibbits, R-Lorenzo, expressed dissatisfaction in the District 33 boundary lines.

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All other legislators expressed support for the plan approved by the Legislature and vetoed by the governor, indicating another sharp political battle. They lament the needless cost of the veto after the special session, which, however, did approve congressional reapportionment.

Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, declared the legislative plan would pass all court challenges.

Sen. William L. Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, suggests the governor look at the same proposal early in the coming session.

Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, declared many hours of bipartisan efforts went into the reapporionment bill that was passed. "I thought it was a pretty good bill," he said. "I don't expect any major signficant changes will be made in the next reapportionment bill." That appears the consensus of the vast majority of the lawmakers.