

The 1981 Idaho Legislature...

City local option prospects look dim

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(Editor's note: This is the 10th 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 is on city local option legislation.)

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Idaho cities have long sought to get more local option powers from the jealous Idaho Legislature, but the efforts have been largely futile in recent years.

Last year, most East Idaho legislators said they were willing to grant some local option powers but when it came to the voting they were among those on the negative side of the rollcall.

It would thus appear that despite what they say in replies to a Post-Register questionnaire this year, if there are any local option laws passed, particularly those relating to granting local taxing powers subject to a vote of the people, the chances are good that nothing will be done.

Sen. William Floyd, R-Idaho Falls; Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls; and Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, were the ones who indicated the strongest interest for this proposal.

Floyd gave a definite "yes".

Mrs. Kearnes said she has always favored local option subject to a two-thirds vote of the people, adding she trusts local people to vote on what tax they want.

Merrill commented "The people today have become interested in local government. I would not fear giving local governments this authority."

Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, who becomes the new chairman of the Senate Local Government and Taxation Committee, and who thus will have a key voice in decision making, avoids a blanket approval but does say he is working on legislation to give the City of Idaho Falls the authorization to construct another bulb turbine outside the city limits which is not a part of the three existing bulb turbines.

Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, a committee member, also extends some sympathy. He acknowledged cities are hurt. He said he frankly sees no local option tax that would get the cities out of their financial dilemma but suggests a study to see whether it is possible to get a broader based tax in which cities can share in the revenue.

A member of the House Local Government, Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, said he would favor a tax shift from the property tax to a local income taxes.

Another member of the committee, Rep. Gary L. Paxman, R-Idaho Falls, declined to comment.

Nearly the entire leadership expresses dim views over granting the city any future additional powers, especially local taxing powers, subject to the vote of the people.

The only one who shows some sympathy as he always has been a friend of the cities is House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg. He said he

sees nothing in giving the cities what powers they need and he would favor that.

Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, comments brusquely cities have plenty of home rule now and it's about time both cities and counties be honest with themselves and cut out what they don't need.

House Speaker Ralph Olmsted, R-Twin Falls, said he would consider what he feels would be a reasonable bill.

The assistant House majority leader, Rep. Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot, said he felt that service fees that are directly related to services will reduce the need for local option taxes, adding he generally favors more local control in some areas.

Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, said there could be some easing up on the present laws and give the cities more leeway in taxes in some local areas but he doesn't know just what they would be."