

Legislative limelights

Budge leader removal move due to obstruction complaints

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The movement to oust Sen. Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, as Senate president pro tem by his own Senate Republican colleagues and replace him with Majority Leader Jim Risch, R-Boise, is not exactly a surprise for those closely viewing the legislative scene.

It's true that Budge reflects the strong Republican conservative philosophy that predominates in the Legislature but even more important among his closest friends he has earned the reputation as an obstructionist.

Budge was just re-elected to a ninth term. A rancher, Budge still clings to the yesteryears and has refused to streamline his thinking to the present age.

At present, senators involved in the leadership fights are telephoning colleagues in an effort to get support.

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Budge's elevation to the top post in the Senate in 1979 as president pro tempore was somewhat a fluke and has resulted in slowing up the legislative process. Budge was a candidate for the position, along with Sen. Richard High, R-Twin Falls, who was favored.

In the Senate Republican caucus it was Sen. Leon Swenson, R-Nampa, a nine-term highly respected legislator, who pointed out a strong conservative tide would warrant picking Budge over the more moderate High as the Senate leader. In what was supposed to be a close vote, Budge won easily.

High, considered one of the top lawmakers in the Legislature, was keenly disappointed and later decided to vacate his post. He eventually was better off because the appreciative Democratic Gov. John V. Evans appointed him to the Idaho Public Utilities Commission when there was a Republican vacancy.

Budge and his Democratic counterpart, Sen. Cy Chase, D-St. Maries, Senate minority leader, were in constant hassle in both the 1979 and 1980 sessions. Both are strong-willed persons and they were equally guilty in their wrangling which frequently clogged Senate action on major legislation which had partisan flavor.

Chase did not choose to run in 1980 and his minority leadership position was taken by an articulate Boise attorney, Sen. Ron J. Twilegar, D-Boise.

Budge did make a smart move in letting Senate Majority Leader Jim Risch, another brilliant Boise attorney, shoulder the major floor action. Risch and Twilegar, both young attorneys, respected each other and worked well together with the result the Senate functioned smoothly the last two sessions.

In the meantime, Budge was accused of all too often harboring grudges with senators of his own party, creating the present animosity that is aimed at his ouster. Budge also fueled a feud with Governor Evans, even to the point of refusing to attend weekly leadership breakfasts with the governor during legislative sessions.

Budge is not entirely at fault as the governor also has a stubborn streak of his own that kept the two at loggerheads much of the time.

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Several veteran east Idaho legislators figure in discussions for leadership positions for the 47th Idaho Legislature to convene in January.

Several of the more moderate legislators label Budge as lacking leadership and whose rigid highly partisan views place him in constant combat with Evans, other Democrats and even many senators in his own party.

Several state senators said that Risch was not favorable at first to replacing Budge but he has since changed his mind when he felt the majority in the Senate Republican Caucus favored the move.

The shifting of leadership posts and committee chairmanship has a domino effect but among east Idahoans figured for leadership are Sens. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls; Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, and Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, for either Senate majority leader or assistant majority leader.

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reversing what Ms. McDermott had done two years previously.

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Sen. William L. Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, has confirmed the movement to oust Budge who he feels has alienated many of the more moderate Republican senators.

Floyd said it appears at least 11 and possibly 12 senators have agreed to support Risch for the post. This is a majority of the Republican senators.

Floyd said informal discussions at the North Idaho Chamber of Commerce meeting last week at Coeur d' Alene suggested Risch for Senate president pro tem; Sen. Laird Noh, R-Kimberly, for majority leader; Sen. Terry Sverdsten, R-Cataldo, for assistant majority leader, and Sen. Walter H. Yarbrough, R-Grand View, to return as caucus chairman.

Floyd has indicated he is interested in seeing a change, pointing out that his hopes to get chairmanship of the Senate Transportation Committee would be dimmed whoever wins.

He noted that if Budge is re-elected, he would not get the chairmanship appointment from Budge and if Budge is defeated Budge likely would be given the transportation committee chairmanship as he is presently a member of that committee.

Williams, Watkins, Ricks and Sen. Vearl Crystal have been firm supporters of Budge.

Watkins said he is interested in a majority or assistant majority post and even a State Affairs Committee position but would not challenge Williams. He was noncommittal whether he might shift his support to Risch.

Williams has indicated he will back Budge in the struggle and his only chance for leadership position is if Budge is re-elected. If Budge loses, it also could cloud Williams' chances for chairmanship of the influential Senate State Affairs Committee for which he has been mentioned.

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Budge lost key support when two conservative leaders did not return, Sen. Wilson Steen, R-Glenns Ferry, the assistant majority leader, who did not seek re-election, and Swenson, who was defeated by Democrat Terry Reilly.

Reports of the returning legislators indicate the leadership picture looks more firm for other positions.

For Senate Democrats, Sen. Kermit Kiebert, Hope, will step up unopposed from assistant minority leader to minority leader to replace Twilegar, who did not seek re-election; Sens. Gary Gould, Pocatello; Ron Beitelspacher, Grangeville; and John Peavey, Carey, for assistant minority leader; and possibly all these four, plus Merrill and Sen. Vernon Lannen, Pinehurst, for minority caucus chairman.

In the House, there is a wide open fight for speaker among Reps. Walter E. Little, New Plymouth, the present majority leader; Steve Antone, Rupert; Tom W. Stivers, Twin Falls; and Robert C. Geddes, Preston, who have all announced for the post; Rep. Jack Kennevick, R-Boise, to return as assistant majority leader; and then Bateman or Rep. Mike Sharp, Nampa, for caucus chairman. One of the losers for speakership likely would then be named to majority leader.

On the Democratic side, besides Hammond as the majority leader, Rep. Louis J. Horvath, Pinehurst, would step up from caucus chairman to assistant minority leader to replace Rep. Marion Davidson, Bonners Ferry, who did not seek re-election, and Horsch for caucus chairman.

The scraps for key committee chairmanship are wide open.

Merrill, for Senate Democrat caucus chairman, a post he held previously; and Reps. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, who has already announced for House Republican caucus chairman and is favored to win it; and Dwight Horsch, R-Aberdeen, for Democratic caucus chairman.

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The only east Idaho legislator in leadership at present is Rep. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, as House minority leader.

Hammond said he is confident of re-election as 10 Democrats have already assured him of support. This is a majority of the 19 Democrats in the House.

The Republicans control the Legislature, 51-19 in the House and 21-14 in the Senate, a Democrat gain of five in the House and two in the Senate from the previous session.

The only possible challenger to Hammond would be Rep. Patricia McDermott, D-Pocatello, who Hammond ousted in 1978.

The situation is muddled and depends on who wins the leadership posts with the losers accepting committee chairmanships.

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In chairmanship assignments, much depends on the leadership results as they have a domino effect.

This will then determine whether Williams, Watkins and Ricks return to their present chairmanships of Natural Resources, Local Government and Taxation, and Commerce and Labor committees, respectively. Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, would likely retain chairmanship of the Senate Agriculture Committee without opposition.

In the House, Reps. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, and Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, are interested primarily in returning as chairmen of the Transportation and Education committees, respectively.

The leadership and committee chairmanship positions will be determined at the reorganization session Dec. 2-4 at Boise.