

The Post-Register

The political pulse

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, February 9, 1983

B-5

Legislative limelights

Law still lacking to limit vote costs

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Up to now there is no bill to limit campaign expenditures of the state and legislative candidates but some candidates, especially those who were defeated but spent large sums of money, have threatened such an action.

Most members of the Legislature are comparatively affluent, although few could be considered wealthy; say in the millionaire class.

A few are wage earners with modest incomes, such as school teachers, retired on a fixed income, service workers, self employed, grocers, realtors, insurance, contractors, merchants businessmen. By far the largest number are ranchers, farmers and others in related agriculture industry which is not exactly seeing the best times. Five are attorneys, three in the Senate and two in the House.

Despite their lack of fat incomes, most of them voted against accepting an increase in expenses, although many privately admitted they could use the increased compensation. Generally, this bill called for increasing expenses from \$44 to \$60 a day but the legislative pay remained about the same.

The bill rejecting the pay increase was buried 57-13 in the House and 29-6 in the Senate last week.

The 343 candidates who vied for the 105 legislative positions reported they sent \$854,061.77 in campaign costs, according to Diane Walker, clerk at the secretary of state office.

Many of them didn't even have competition but there were several hot races which prompted heavy expenditures, particularly in Boise, Idaho Falls, Pocatello, and a few other points.

All of the candidates have now filed their campaign reports but many were several weeks late.

The campaign financing system at present, bluntly, isn't of much value because it should require more reporting during the campaigns and immediately preceding the elections so the voters know how much candidates are spending. Under the present system, they don't know until after the election.

Spending the most was Republican Dean Sorenson in Boise District 17 with \$43,200, most of it his own money, but he lost almost 2-1 to Democrat Gail Bray, who reported \$21,400, the fourth highest. They competed for the seat vacated by Senator Minority Leader Ron Twilegar, Boise Democrat.

Next highest spenders were two Boise Republican senators, William Ringert, \$23,048, and Gary Chapman, \$21,543.

There were a number who spent \$10,000 or more. In this category in the Idaho Falls area was Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, highest with \$12,223, followed by his defeated challenger, Democrat John Combo \$10,745; then Republican State Rep. J.F. Chadband \$10,567, and his beaten Democrat challenger, Anne Voilleque, \$9,166.

Others of the highest spenders in the area included Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot \$7,299, and his vanquished Republican opponent, R.C. "Bob" Welker, Shelley, \$7,911.

The only campaign reporting bill submitted so far and now pending in the Senate is one that would bring some minor alterations. It would require only a year-end report by candidates at an off-election year, rather than two reports. It also would require post primary reports by both losers and winners, rather than just winner reports. Other reporting procedures would stay about the same.

The campaign costs are rather eyebrow-lifting when considering the legislative pay is only about \$5,100 a year, or some \$500,000 for the 105 legislators.

Most of the legislators, especially those with jobs, says it costs them to serve the legislature.

Despite talk to the contrary, these people who are called on to make decisions that affect the pocket, way of life and morals of their fellow men should be paid far more than they are now.

The situation is rather ludicrous in view of the fact that Idaho pays its legislators one of the lowest salaries of any in the nation, ranking about fifth from the bottom. Its state salaries also are low, although some increases were granted a couple of years ago. Its tragic that many have to spend so much money for election campaigns for such low-paying jobs.