

Bateman urges actions to shun property tax hike

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

BOISE — The only east Idaho legislator in House majority leadership Tuesday urged all possible steps to avoid a property tax increase.

House Majority Caucus Leader Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, said unless the necessary funding is attained to meet the anticipated \$69 million shortfall, the property tax hike is probable.

"We don't want to go to the property tax if at all possible," said Bateman in a Post-Register interview.

Bateman said "imaging what would happen if we put on a 6 cents sale tax increase, or jumping it from 3 to 9 cents."

He said the Legislature must now come up with some major financial proposals to meet the deficit as state government under the constitution is prevented from going into the red.

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"We will need some big items to meet the shortfall," said Bateman.

He then pointed out the Residential Tax Exemption Initiative, or 50-50 as it is familiarly called in referring to 50 percent or \$50,000 home tax exemption, will cause a noticeable shift of some 43 percent tax to business and farmers.

"The people voted the tax exemption initiative so we have go rule that out," said Bateman. "It must be implemented."

Bateman noted the borrowing on state building looks like the most viable proposal at present to raise the big money.

He remarked that New York did this on its subway system and California is also contemplating a similar step on some of its state properties which amount to billions of dollars.

Jones seeks to speed up remap suit

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
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BOISE — Attorney General Jim Jones said Friday he is seeking to expedite action on a pending Supreme Court legislative reapportionment lawsuit so that it can be settled before the 1984 general election campaign.

Jones said he is still awaiting final briefs from the Supreme Court. A north Idaho faction challenged the reapportionment plan on grounds it split county lines and this was upheld by a north Idaho district judge.

The attorney general last year, David H. Leroy, then appealed the ruling.

"It would appear the court decision will probably be argued later this year," said Jones. "I have been considering asking that it be expedited but I don't think it will be. It's my concern that the entire suit be settled early enough so that it won't affect the 1984 elections."

He pointed out this means it should be handled by early next year because county clerks prepare for the May 1984 primaries at that time.

Jones also issued an opinion that it's legal to use state buildings as collateral for loans to meet a state financial shortfall, but illegal to mortgage the buildings.

"The collateral is legal but from a political standpoint I have some reservations," said Jones. "If you liquidate the buildings you reduce the state balanced assets. It could affect the state credit rating."

"Some of the legislators believe it may be the only alternative left to go but I would like to see other avenues explored."

Legislative leaders said Friday this proposal appears abandoned.

Jones is working on an attorney consolidation proposal that he says will meet the approval of Gov. John V. Evans.

He noted the attorney general office is the largest legal office in the state with 58 attorneys — 16 in the central office in Boise and 42 in various agencies around the state.

A consolidation would help efficiency, said Jones, because busier attorneys could receive help from others less occupied.

Jones said he is attempting to meet the governor's objections by proposing that the governor's private attorney be exempt from

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consolidation and that a state agency has a veto power over assignment of an attorney to its agency.

"Actually," said Jones, "only five attorneys are directly affected, three in the Department of Transportation and two in the Department of Law Enforcement. The other attorneys are supposedly under the attorney general but they take their orders from the directors of the agencies to which they are assigned."

He also said it could save money, noting that the Oregon attorney general said their consolidation saved 25 percent.

"In these dire financial times, such savings will be appreciated," said Jones.

Jones said he found a ready-made staff awaiting him when he took office in January. Only three attorneys opted to leave.

Mike Kennedy, Rexburg, became the Rigby magistrate to replace Grant Young, who was elected district judge; John Sutton, joined former Ada County prosecutor Jim Harris as a Boise law partner.

He named David High, Twin Falls, formerly with the Public Utilities Commission, as advisor to the Board of Examiners.

He replaced Kennedy with Mark Haws, Kootenai County deputy prosecutor, but will leave the other two positions open until May to save money, he said.