

Legislative leaders predict two-week special session

Sun July 5, 1981

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The two top Idaho legislative leaders Friday predicted the special Legislative session scheduled to begin Tuesday will take most of two weeks to reapportion the 35 legislative districts and the two congressional districts.

Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, agreed it will be a tough task for legislative reapportionment because it has what they described "a domino effect as changing the boundary lines of one district affects all other districts."

Both Budge and Olmstead said they are generally opposed to adding any other topics to the special session and Gov. John V. Evans had told them he will not do so unless there is assurance such proposals have good chances of being enacted.

The two said the governor told them, however, he reserves the right to add any topic, even during the session, if he thinks it is justified.

Evans has leaned for asking \$150,000 supplemental funding for the Office of aging to finance home health care for senior citizens but both Budge and Olmstead expressed coolness to the idea.

They said they feared opening up one request for supplemental funding could encourage others.

"We will have enough trouble with reapportionment alone without taking on new problems," said Budge.

Senate Majority Leader Jim Risch, R-Boise, said he is not opposed to the \$150,000 Office of Aging additional appropriation, and this view has been expressed by a number of eastern Idaho legislators.

Olmstead said if there is any supplemental funding from an anticipated surplus he would favor it be appropriated to go back to the Water Pollution Fund.

Olmstead noted the Legislature took some \$5.5 million from the Water Pollution Fund to pay for Medicaid deficits.

Richard A. Slaughter, Boise, chief economist for the Office of the Division of Finance Management, Tuesday predicted between a \$10-\$12 million surplus. Of this, \$7.1 million has already been approved by the Board of Examiners to go for property tax relief to reimburse property owners from the 3.85 percent holdback invoked a year ago.

Both Budge and Olmstead agreed that in the first two or three days of the session all of the legislators will be split into five or six regional groups, such as for the panhandle, north central, Boise, Twin Falls, Pocatello and Idaho Falls areas.

After they have discussed their possible remap proposals they will join in a single body to get a statewide proposal.

The governor and Olmstead suggested much of the troubles could be solved by simply giving the Boise area an extra district, or have 36 districts

instead of 35. Budge said he opposes this as it would upset a traditional system and encourage changes in number in future session.

"I think this would remove the stability of the legislative districts," said Budge.

Reapportionment discussions at regional meetings held the past month have indicated the Boise area will get at least one additional legislative district and a third of another. It likely may come at the expense of southeastern counties south of Pocatello, south central counties north of Twin Falls and north central counties south and east of Lewiston.

"I don't think there is anything so pressing that can't wait until the next session, less than six months away," said Budge in referring to adding proposals other than reapportionment.

Both Olmstead and Budge agreed the most simple congressional reapportionment is shifting some 21,000 people in Ada County from the 1st to the 2nd District to equalize the population. The governor, however, has indicated opposition to splitting Ada or any other county for congressional reapportionment.

Sen. Ron Twilegar, D-Boise, Senate minority leader, also opposes splitting Ada County for congressional districts, although about a fourth of the county is presently in the 2nd District.

Budge and Olmstead both agreed it may be necessary to dip into Ada and other southwestern counties to equalize legislative redistricting. They viewed

with little enthusiasm the Ada legislators proposal for keeping Ada County intact for five districts.

Budge and Olmstead said after two or three days of regional meetings, they will then consider the statewide reapportionment.

Budge and Olmstead said they did not know if a Saturday session will be held but both indicated the deliberations likely will spill over until next week. Olmstead suggested Thursday, July 16, as the possible day of adjournment and Budge agreed it likely will be near the end of that second week.

Risch has said the session could wind up Friday night but both Olmstead and Budge felt this is unrealistic.

The governor also has predicted near a two-week session.

Unless there is a suspension of the rules, Olmstead pointed out it takes a minimum of three days to pass a law through both chambers.

"We have to consider geographic features, such as natural barriers," said Budge, in noting North Idaho is separated by mountain ranges from South Idaho.

Budge observed that his own district (District 32) made up of Caribou, Bear Lake and Franklin counties is about 2,400 short. It needs to expand either north into Bonneville or west into Oneida or Bannock to equalize the population.

"This in turn will create the domino effect," said

Budge. "The same thing happens in north Idaho as those districts have to push south to equalize the legislative district population."

The state grew from 713,015 to 941,935 the last decade, requiring legislative district populations to increase to 26,969.

Olmstead also agreed the regional legislators will be grouped together whether they are senators, representatives, Republicans or Democrats to seek to solve their own ramapping problems.

"They will know better than anyone how they can adjust the boundary lines in their districts," said Olmstead.

Olmstead observed there is the physical problem of trying to install two more desks in the House if there is an increase to 36 districts. The Senate has adequate room for one more desk.

Olmstead agreed with Budge on the procedural steps, saying only one committee—State Affairs made up primarily of the leadership—would be created in each house, along with skeleton staff members and attaches.

Olmstead noted his own district, District 25, and most of the Twin Falls area is near the statewide average.

"There likely will be some legislators who will not like the new areas to be included in their districts and that's where we will have our problems," said Olmstead.