

The Post-Register

The political pulse

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E-7

Legislative limelights...

Legislative district hike in numbers is tempting

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BOISE — The 105 lawmakers gathered here under the marble dome of the State Capitol to reapportion legislative and congressional districts know they face a tough problem.

Each one has his own idea how legislative districts should be reapportioned, particularly affecting his own district. This would indicate there are at least 105 legislative redistricting plans, plus those favored by Gov. John V. Evans, the state elective officers and a few observers.

In the past, reapportionment has brought frayed tempers and sharp disagreements. As a result, the Idaho Supreme Court has been forced to reject some of the proposals and the legislators have had to come up with new proposals.

Rep. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, House minority leader, says the Democrats have the strength of a gubernatorial veto if the Republicans seek any gerrymandering in their favor. Gerrymandering is the term applied to grotesquely changing boundaries that favor a candidate.

Most legislators say they also will seek to avoid changes that pit one incumbent against another. Many don't see a major problem in this.

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The vast majority of the legislators would like to retain 35 legislative districts but if there are sharp disagreements and inability to come to terms they might consider simply giving the Boise area another district, increasing the number to 36. This would permit minimum changing of boundaries in the 35 other legislative districts. It would reduce the number of people required for each district from 26,969 to 26,861.

Evans and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, have both mentioned this possibility.

Olmstead said "it is the coward's way out," but nevertheless it can be considered in case the

drastic changing of boundary lines becomes too traumatic.

Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, expresses opposition, believing it would upset stability of the legislative lineup. However, his District 32, in Caribou, Franklin and Bear Lake counties, is about 2,400 short. Addition of a new district would minimize the shortage by 1,000.

Most legislators and court rulings indicate there should not be more than 10 percent deviation from the lowest to the highest figure of each district. This means a latitude of not more than 5 percent above or 5 percent below the deal figure of 26,969, or about 1,300 people less or more.

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The Boise area, which already had the largest population, grew by 54.2 percent, or from 112,230 to 173,036. It allows the county an additional legislative district and a third of another. Giving the area the additional district would then lessen the impact in changing boundaries of other districts.

East Idaho, north Idaho and the Twin Falls area are close to the number of population needed for each districts. The counties south of Bannock county, meaning Franklin, Bear Lake and Oneida, and some south central counties, such as Cassia, Lincoln and Elmore, are short. Adjustments in these areas are needed but it wouldn't be severe. It probably would mean drawing on some 8,000 more from Ada County to equalize the number.

As Budge described it, the boundary changes have a "domino effect," because any changes, no matter how minor, has effect on all the other counties.

Yet, if the legislators are unable to reach an agreement on the 35 districts, they can in desperation add the extra district to Ada, pack up their duffle bags and go home.



Post-Register

Minority leader

HOUSE MINORITY Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, is expected to take a leading part in legislative reapportionment in the special session of the Idaho Legislature.