The Post-Register
The political pulse
Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, July 22, 1981 C-5

Legislative limelights...

Legislature remapping delay annoys voters

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

BOISE — Idahoans can't understand why 105 men and women of reasonable intelligence at the Legislature are having so much trouble at what appears a fairly simple task of redrafting 35 legislative district boundaries.

Most, including this writer, believed the task should have been wound up in the first week, and certainly no longer than two weeks, but here it is in the third week and the struggles goes on.

The six legislative districts embracing the 10 east Idaho counties had the easiest chore of the entire state. Their averages totaled 26,959, almost perfect, or 10 short, of the statewide legislative average of 26,969.

Their redistricting mainly centered on shifting a couple of Rexburg precincts in District 31, east Bonneville and Teton, which in turn tranferred some 6,000 in east Idaho Falls precincts to District 30, central Bonneville and Shelley, and 1,100 more in northeast Idaho Falls precincts to District 29, west Bonneville and Butte. This was done early in the session, although some refinement was undertaken later.

* * *

As the session struggled it became obvious there were three burning trouble spots, all affecting the constituency of powerful legislators. They were plans to move some 3,500 from eastern Cassia County to southeastern counties south of Pocatello; moving the north-south line to transfer some 5,600 in Adams county and half of Valley county to North Idaho; and giving Ada County another legislative district outright. The latest fight centers in District 33 in consolidating Oneida, Power and south Bannock, opposed by the Democrats but favored by the Republicans.

It would appear giving Ada county another legislative district because of its rapid population growth would have been the fairest but this will not come about. The Legislature is controlled by rural Republicans who plan to diffuse much of Boise redistricting into the outlying rural areas.

The troubles in the other two districts are not as easily solved. The powerful Rep. Vard Chatburn, R-Albion, dean of the Legislatue, strenuously objects to shifting part of his home district in eastern Cassia to the southeast; while equally influential legislators, Sen. David Little, R-Emmett, and Rep. Morgan Munger, R-Ola, are not exactly happy at losing part of their districts embracing Adams and Valley counties.

* * *

Another stumbling block are the Democrats who are comparatively few in numbers but have the powerful threat of a gubernatorial veto. The Republicans control the House by an overwhelming 56-14, and the Senate 23-12, in other words, only 26 Democrats to 79 Republicans. The salient situation here is the fact the Senate Democrats have a majority of ione to sustain a gubernatorial veto.

The Republicans, if they could, would like simply to dip into Bannock County and obliterate one legislative district and settle the problem. However, powerful Democrats, such as Sens. Chick Bilyeu and Gary H. Gould, Pocatello, and Bert Marley, McCammon, and Reps. Patricia L. McDermott, Pocatello, might be affected and their objections would be sustained by a veto of their Democratic governor, John V. Evans. The Republicans know this.

In North Idaho, some Democrats also are opposing some boundary changes that would force them to run against each other, and again a gubernatorial veto is their strong point.

Most of the top Republican leadership is not vitally affected. This includes House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, Twin Falls, who is dropping his legislative toga to run for governor; Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budges, Soda Springs, who needs to only pick up a couple of adjacent precincts; House Majority Leader Walter E.Little, New Plymouth, who also needs to add a couple of adjacent precincts; and Senate Majority Leader James Risch, Boise, whose district is well over the average and needs to give away population.

Only the two Republican caucus chairmen, Sen. Walter Yarbrough, Grand View, and Rep. Bud Lewis, St.Maries, face problems. Lewis objects running against three Democrat incumbents for two seats in District 7 while Yarbrough is angered at proposals seeking to shift Democratic Elmore county into his district.

* * *

The main delays have resulted that no matter what plan is proposed there are a large number of legislators, including powerful ones, in opposition. It's then obvious the legislators are going to have to approve one proposals with the least amount of opposition.

In all of this continual drawing and redrawing of lines and studying legislative and precinct figures, Sens. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, and William L. Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, have taken a leading part. Their regional plans have been generally accepted as the basis for legislative reapportionment. It generally provides for about 1.5 percent under statewide legislative average each in the southeast, south central and north, and about 1.5 percent over in the southwest.

In all these legislative deliberations, most Idaho voters couldn't care less. In fact, a large number, maybe a majority, don't even know the number of their legislative district, or who represents them. They can't understand why these lawmakers are spending some $10,000 a day on reapportionment which may cost $200,000 for the maximum 20 days the special session may run. They are justified in this criticism as it is only the selfish views of legislators who are delaying reapportionment.

It's significant, the legislators took only a week in settling congressional redistricting because it didn't affect them personally, only the two congressmen who had agreed beforehand to shifting 15 Boise precincts to even the population.

The main point now is to settle the legislative boundaries within those regions — and that's the dilemma. Yet, this is necessary and whatever plan is passed also faces the threat of a gubernatorial veto if there is a drastic gerrymanderning proposal, or a court suit from disgruntled legislators who may not like the plan.