

The 1983 Idaho Legislature

Legislators divide sharply over local option proposal

(Editor's note: This is the first in a series of 14 articles giving the views of east Idaho legislators on issues shaping up for the coming session. This first one is on local option.)

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East Idaho senators appear sharply divided on granting cities local option powers, but this is a change of previous years when the majority were opposed.

The new Senate president pro tem, Sen. James Risch, R-Boise, said he generally favors granting cities more local option power but added "I am cautious on bonding."

Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, vice chairman of the Senate Local Government and Taxation Committee, who has in the past been not too sympathetic for some municipal legislation, apparently has a change of heart.

"With the new federalism coming down from Washington, the Legislature will have to give local units of government the tools they need to get the job done," he said. "Our local City Council members and county commissioners can always be more responsive to people's needs."

Senate Majority Leader Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, said he has always favored home rule as much as possible, adding "in some areas, the cities would rather have uniformity on a state level."

The new Senate majority caucus chairman, Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, said he would favor more power for planning and zoning. He added each project must be judged on its merits, and urged the local governments to cooperate with utilities.

House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, said he has always been in favor of more city home rule and will continue to do so.

State Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, outlined his opposition in detail, saying "present authorities seem to be adequate for cities regarding planning, zoning, reopening budgets, revenue bonding and other matters. If more authority is needed specifically in some of these areas I would favor the Legislature granting it."

He then explained that he has opposed local option taxes because he feels business establishments could be placed in an unfair competitive position. For example, he said Idaho Falls could impose a sales tax but Pocatello would not.

"Other conditions being equal where is a customer going to buy a \$10,000 to \$15,000 car, furniture, building, materials and other large items?" he asked.

"Idaho would soon become a hodge-podge of a variety of

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local taxes in a variety of amounts. Collection, recordkeeping and reporting of local taxes would also impose an additional burden upon businesses for which they would receive no compensation."

State Rep. Rich Orme, R-St. Anthony, said he also is afraid of local option, and particularly opposes one for local sales tax. He noted the Legislature passed the Industrial Revenue Bonds but that he is concerned the city might make it a less effective system.

Full approval for local control was given by Rep. J. F. Chadband, R-Idaho Falls, a new legislator.

Sen. Vearl C. Crystal, R-Rigby, indicated some disfavor, saying he would have to look at local option proposals and judge them on their merits.

State Rep. Ray E. Infanger, R-Salmon, contended local option is another issue that he feels the citizens should vote on as an initiative.

A somewhat similar expression was given by Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, the new House majority caucus chairman, who said "I would favor local option income taxes, with a vote of the people only if they were used to replace property tax."

State Rep. Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, said "the sales tax should be exclusive to the state so it can be collected equitably and distributed fairly. Other than that, local governments should have more power. Every means should be given good consideration to let cities develop power plants."

In his response, Sen. William L. Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, expressed opposition. He said "cities and counties are political subdivisions of the state. Where they can govern themselves with no impact on their neighbors they should be allowed to do so. Local option taxing, however would impact their neighbors. I don't favor it. I favor the revenue bonding approach so long as there are restraints that outline equity."

Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, said "cities should be able to float industrial revenue bonds."