Cripps will ask tax committee for new system

The Post-Register, Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, June 15, 1983 A-3

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Two Idaho Falls officials left Wednesday for Boise to attend a Thursday session of the newly formed Interim State Tax Structure Committee.

The committee was formed to study comprehensive reform of the property tax system.

Departing were Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, committee co-chairman and Bonneville County Assessor Boyd L. Cripps, who said he will ask for a system that will bring more funding to help the county Motor Vehicle Bureau cope with crowded conditions.

Watkins said he expects the meeting, scheduled to start at the Statehouse at 9 a.m., will last all day.

Watkins is serving as co-chairman with Rep. Steve Antone, R-Rupert. Other committee members include Sens. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby; Gary Gould, D-Pocatello; and Vernon Lannen, D-Pinehurst; and Reps. Rachel Gilbert, R-Boise; Dwight Horsch, D-Aberdeen; Don Loveland, R-Burley; and Harold Reid, D-Craigmont.

Cripps said he is becoming increasingly concerned over a shortage of funds on the county level to help discharge his office's increasing duties.

"We have more work to do and less people to do it," said Cripps.

He said the most serious situation is in the Motor Vehicle License Bureau, which is under his jurisdiction.

"There have been cases where some vehicle and boat owners have had to wait as long as two hours," said Cripps. "Our clerks are crowded into small spaces to do their work. The county commissioners have no funds to help us expand or hire more help.

"Transacting license business is often painstaking work that can take as much as 25 to 45 minutes for each client. I've pitched in to help.

"Our clerks are doing work to transfer some $2 million in receipts each month for sending to Boise. I wonder why we can't keep some of the money here. That's why I am going to Boise, to see what we can do about changing the law."

Cripps said there are plans for moving the bureau to a nearby former hotel or a title company that plans to vacate its present quarters. He said the county could acquire some state property on the the city's northern outskirts to erect a building.

"These are all alternatives but we simply can't get the money to lease, buy or build for such quarters," said Cripps.

Cripps said many of his experienced clerks are becoming discouraged and may leave.

"You know," he said, "it takes four or five years to fully train these clerks. When they leave it means training some one all over again."

Watkins said he welcomed Cripps' input and that from anyone else who can help in overhauling the tax structure.

Both he and Cripps lamented that property taxes are becoming the whipping boy for more public funding in view of the state deficits.

Watkins said the committee will try to review studies made in part on the property tax in the 50s and 60s and go over some their recommendations.

"Any suggestion will be welcomed by the committee," Watkins said.

Watkins said the 1983 Legislature passed House Concurrent Resolution 33, which set up the interim tax structure committee.

The resolution, he said, authorized the Legislative Council to appoint a committee to study the state's tax structure.

Watkins said the matter of sales tax exemptions also will be scrutinized, adding 26 exemptions deprive the state of some $200 million annually.