

The Post-Register

The political pulse

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, January 6, 1982

The 1982 Idaho Legislature . . .

Solons favor cities getting more powers

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the 14th in a series of 16 articles giving the views of east Idaho legislators and the leadership on the salient issues shaping up for the coming session. This one deals on giving cities more powers.)

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

Nearly all east Idaho Legislators favor giving cities more powers, especially in the matter of floating revenue bonds. This should indicate a bright municipal legislative year.

However, this optimistic view was expressed a year ago in response to questionnaires but when the legislators clustered under the marble dome of the State Capitol, most important city-oriented legislation was torpedoed, including the revenue bond proposal.

Perhaps the situation will improve this year but veteran observers of the legislators can't help but be skeptical in the way the jealous legislators have been reluctant to grant cities more powers. Yet they should be the first to admit that cities and counties do a far better job of governing their constituencies than does the state.

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House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, an announced gubernatorial candidate, said he could support certain local options but not sales tax.

Rep. Rich Orme, R-St. Anthony, said he believes control needs should be on the local level. However, he said he doesn't like the revenue bond concept as they are tax exempt. He acknowledges he may be in the abject minority as all states except Idaho and one other do not have this provision. He also emphasized that any sales tax should be statewide not local option—as this would pit cities against cities and would mean, for example, residents of Fremont help financing Bonneville County if Idaho Falls has a local option sales tax and St. Anthony did not.

Many legislators skipped answering the general question of giving cities local option powers but many did say they favored the cities get revenue power plant authority. These includes Rep. Ray E. Infanger, R-Salmon; Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo; Linden B.

Bateman, R-Idaho Falls; John O. Sessions, R-Driggs; Martin Trillhaase, R-Idaho Falls; Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls; and House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg.

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Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the Senate Local Government and Taxation Committee, noted he successfully sponsored the legislation some five years ago that made possible the bulb turbine plants. However, this legislation was for existing plants, not new construction for which a bill failed to pass last year.

Rep. Gary L. Paxman, R-Idaho Falls, was one of the few who said he would look at local option tax and also favored revenue bonds as long as they are not tied to the property tax.

Sens. J. Marsden Willians, R-Idaho Falls, and Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, and Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls said they favor more city home rule under the existing taxing structure.

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Sen. Israel Merrill, D—Blackfoot, usually a loyal city backer, surprisingly expressed reluctance. He said "if cities are given these added taxing abilities we will have another revolt. The revenue bond is very volatile. Most of those cities which need it have legislators who refuse to help others who have problems. Thus, they have trouble getting support for their proposals.

Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, a ranking member of the Local Government and Taxation Committee, said he had no objection giving cities more home rules to levy taxes on the local level, adding "they have their back to the walls." He also favored industrial revenue bonds but entered some doubts on their tax exemption status, saying that county assessors would have problems with this.

Sen. William L. Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, warmly backed local option powers for cities and also new revenue bonds, but only after private utilities have had an opportunity to respond within a measured time frame. He added "local entities have responsibility to deliver benefits of facilities, whatever they may be, as economically as possible."