

The western scene

Western governors unite on mutual state problems

By BEN J. PLASTINO
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The recent Western Governor's Conference at Kalispell, Mont., demonstrated a desire by the governors to unite for solving western problems and also a mounting antagonism against Secretary of Interior James Watt.

All of the governors agreed they would keep in close touch with each other to discuss mutual problems, particularly in the field of public lands and agriculture.

Idaho's Gov. John V. Evans was given the most headlines for his sharp exchanges with Watt but actually the debates between Watt and New Mexico Gov. Toney Anaya and Montana Gov. Ted Schwinden were much more vitriolic.

Even the Republican governors privately expressed dismay at Watts' strong pro-development policies but understandably they kept their discourses at a low profile.

The Western governors took a giant step in enhancing their powers by favoring the consolidation of two rival organizations. They are the Western Governors Conference and the Western Governors Policy Office, known as WESTPO. They will be renamed the Western Governors Association.

The governors agreed both organizations divided their efforts and diluted their power. It was agreed the consolidation will be worked out during the next year and be ready for a formal vote at the 1984

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conference which is scheduled to be held in California for the first time as long as can be remembered.

WESTPO was created in 1976 to form an energy policy among Western states but it eventually resulted in controversy because some governors refused to join and other threatened to leave the WGC in favor of WESTPO. Evans leaned toward WESTPO, which apparently will hold its final meeting at Bismark, N.D., Aug. 18-20.

Evans grabbed most of the headlines. He said he still was concerned because Watt, in his presentation, said one criterion to justify the land sale was that the money could be used to help balance the federal budget.

Evans said he objected to this and also to Watt's rejoinder that the he and the governors were in agreement on this, when in fact, they were far apart. Evans particularly objected to the executive order creating the Property Review Board. He said he did not agree with Watt in proposed disposal of BLM lands in Idaho next year, particularly 14,000 acres in southern Idaho.

A resolution unanimously sup-

ported by the governors, called for the governors to have a chance to review and concur with the disposal of any federal land.

Aside from Watt and public lands, the Western governors were most concerned with boosting the power of U.S. farming, particularly in western states.

Washington Republican Gov. John Spellman said America is like a Third World country when it comes to agriculture, exporting its raw materials for processing elsewhere. He added Western farmers and ranchers should recognize their prosperity is tied directly to that of the rest of the world. He added that while most American agricultural exports go to prosperous nations, major growth in demand is coming from poorer nations.

He criticized eastern states for supporting world trade protectionism which is supposed to prevent foreign competition for American-manufactured goods.

Schwinden was elected the new conference chairman, replacing Oregon Gov. Victor Atiyeh, while California Gov. George Deukmejian was named vice chairman, even though he did not attend.

Symms lists guidelines to better nation's schools

By BEN J. PLASTINO
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Sen. Steve Symms backs President Reagan in not giving schools more funding but says instead an upgrading is needed.

"Local and state school bodies must be allowed to adopt programs that are best for them, he said. "That is why I think the money should be better spent if left at home or sent directly to the classroom in the form of block grants."

In his weekly report from Washington, Symms observes "President Reagan is taking more and more heat from the Democratic presidential contenders for opposing their call for massive and unconditional expenditures on our education system."

He then said "if someone could guarantee that all this money the candidates want to spend would really improve our school systems and help deserving teachers, I would be the first to vote 'yea'."

He said all observers agree "that the quality of education — once the pride of the nation — is becoming a national embarrassment."

He remarked that high school graduates today score almost 40 points below their 1963 counterparts on standard mathematics tests, and 50 points lower on verbal tests.

He added America is falling behind other industrial nations and costing this nation jobs.

He endorsed merit pay "for hard-

working and capable teachers."

"I am not of a mind to cut back on our commitment to education but I have to say that President Reagan is right when he says that more money is not the answer," says Symms. "What we need is a new approach — a return to tried and true educational methods."

He contended the record of the federal government is one for more bureaucracy and more useless programs.

"The net results," he said, "is the people on the banks of the Potomac are telling the people on the banks of the Snake River how to run their schools."

He said the "programs of education should be set at the level closest to the student, not in Washington where money gets lost with administrators, program allocators and a lot of other people who dream up ways to spend money."

Other positive steps that can be taken, he said, include return to the basics of English, mathematics and the sciences in teachers college; offering bonuses and special incentives for those who teach the substantive courses; merit pay for teachers free of politics and favoritism; performances to ensure that students have mastered basic skills by requiring consistent and regular testing for every grade level; and following standards that underscore the need for schools and classrooms to again be ruled by discipline and academic order.