

The 1981 Idaho Legislature...

# College student fee hikes backed by legislators

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(Editor's note: This is the 6th in a series of 16 articles giving the views of East Idaho legislators and leadership on the salient issues shaping up for the coming session. This is on higher education.)

**BY BEN J. PLASTINO**  
Post-Register political editor

East Idaho legislators generally feel university student fees should be increased and that Lewis-Clark College be consolidated with the University of Idaho, or designated as a vocational technical school.

Rep. Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the House Education Committee, suggests a constitutional amendment to allow tuition in lieu of fees because the fees the universities and colleges charge are very limited.

Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, a new member of the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee, said he favors no consolidation of the universities but believes student fee hikes should be considered, along with all other tax increases.

The Republican leadership headed by Senate President Pro Ten Reed Budge, Soda Springs; Majority Leader James E. Risch, Boise; House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, Twin Falls, and Majority Leader Walter Little, New Plymouth, all take dim views of any fund increases.

Olmstead recommends eliminating the academic program at Lewis-Clark State College, meaning that it retain vocational education and other technical subjects.

Budge said he would consider consolidating Lewis-Clark with the University of Idaho.

The House minority leader, Rep. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, a Ricks College professor, said he has empathy with the Lewis-Clark problems but that perhaps some academic programs could be consolidated with UI.

Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, a Bonneville High School teacher, says flatly that Lewis-Clark College should be phased out, and that Idaho is too small to have four state-supported universities. He said Wyoming has only one.

Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, said he wished Secretary of Interior Cecil Andrus would speed up the land exchange pro-

gram so that the state could get in-lieu funds to help the schools. He also said Lewis-Clark consolidation should be considered.

Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, said the State Education Board increased university fees \$50 per year. He also favors studying Lewis-Clark merger.

Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, said consolidating Lewis-Clark with UI would save \$3 million.

Sen. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, said he accepts the concept of student fee hikes and feels it is impractical and uneconomical for Idaho to support four institutions of higher education. Instead, he said, he would favor giving Lewis-Clark to the community and let it support the institution.

Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, said that during the 1980 session he sponsored a proposed constitutional amendment which would permit the universities to charge tuition for Idaho students. The bill failed partially because the state education board almost unanimously opposed it. He said the board now has reversed its position.

"It will be two years now before the electorate can act on the issue," said Sessions. "In the meantime, there may be a necessity to have some substantial cuts in programs. Several of us will be looking closely at the present role of Lewis-Clark. It may be appropriate to combine some of the courses there with that at UI where possible. Also it may be appropriate to convert Lewis-Clark into a vocational technical school.

Sen. William Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, said, "We need to review the taxpayers constitutional obligation to subsidizing post-secondary education, especially beyond the bachelor degrees. Consolidation does not necessarily mean as good as or better than in a small school."

Favoring student fee increases were Reps. Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot, Martin Trillaase, R-Idaho Falls; and Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo. Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, said she didn't like fee increases but it may be necessary. Mrs. Kearnes said Lewis-Clark likely should be devoted to a vocational education institution.