

The 1981 Idaho Legislature . . .

*Sun. Dec. 28, 1980*

# State employees may get slight salary increases

(This is the eighth of 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 is on state employee salary increases.)

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Most legislators responding to a Post-Register questionnaire are in favor of salary increases for state public employees, although this will hinge on the money available.

Sen. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, member of the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee, which has the key voice in determining this, reflects the views of most of the lawmakers by saying he feels state salaries should be in line with the private sector.

"We cannot expect the taxing public to support state employee salaries at a higher rate than they receive for like employment," said Ricks.

Another member of the committee, Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, said "Maybe this is the year for across-the-board dollar increase for everyone, rather than percentage increases."

Most of the leadership is less generous, such as Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, who favors no state increase, or maybe very little, depending on the revenue available.

House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, said he "believes in Idaho continuing to be a prevailing rate payer"; and even Majority Leader Walter E. Little, R-New Plymouth, who has registered opposition to most state programs, relents enough to say "to a limited degree under the funds available."

Senate Majority Leader Walter E. Little, R-New Plymouth, agrees a cost-of-living increase will be necessary.

House Majority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, said he hoped an 8 percent increase can be granted.

Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, said "I think we should all hold the line on these increases, including Legislature, state, county and public elected officials."

Most of the legislators agree there should be some increase, at least, cost-of-living, but dislike setting a percentage until they see the anticipated revenue.

Rep. Martin Trillhaase, R-Idaho Falls, takes a different approach, saying high-salaried administrators, the governor and legislators should set the example this year by not taking increases.

Sen. William Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, said he favored merit raises where practical.

Not so optimistic was Rep. Gary L. Paxman, R-Idaho Falls, who said "I feel increases are going to be hard to come by."

Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, said he favors a modest cost of living increase for public employes but no hikes for legislators.

Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, is more specific, naming 9.5 percent increase in salaries, adding "I do support giving them a modest cost-of-living increase. However, until such time as the new revenue projection is determined it will not be possible to determine just how much an increase can be given."