

The 1981 Idaho Legislature...

Solons oppose Department of Energy

2nd Dec. 31, 1980

(Editor's note: This is the ninth in a series of 16 articles giving the views of East Idaho legislators and leadership the salient issues shaping up for the coming session. This is on plans for a full-fledged Department of Energy or changes in other state departments.)

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

It comes as no surprise that virtually all legislators strongly oppose the creation of a full-fledged Department of Energy, even though one is badly needed to handle the myriad of duties associated with energy shortages, one of the prime issues of the world today.

At present, an Office of Energy manned by a skeleton crew is handling the duties. A full-fledged department would likely cost \$400,000 or more as was mentioned last year, but it likely would qualify for considerably more federal matching funds.

Such a proposal was largely ignored by the Idaho Legislature in the 1980 session and to such an extent that Gov. John V. Evans announced he did not plan to push such an issue in the coming session.

Perhaps Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, new chairman of the Senate Local Government and Taxation Committee, gives the best explanation by stating: "no, the governor has backed off and will not ask for a full-fledged Department of Energy. This is a wise decision on his behalf."

Some believe there should be changes in some other departments.

For example, Sen. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, said he favored health districts operating on some local direction as they are now.

House Majority Leader Walter E. Little, R-New Plymouth, said

he sponsored legislation last session to combine public health districts with the Department of Health and Welfare that could save \$600,000. The measure, however, was kept buried in the House Health and Welfare Committee.

Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, said he favored putting all health functions in district health departments.

House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, also said he would support a move to place the public health departments under DHW.

Opposition to placing the Public Health Departments under DHW was strongly expressed by Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the House Health and Welfare Committee.

Sen. William Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, said that perhaps duties of a proposed Department of Energy could be handled by the Idaho Public Utilities Committee and Department of Water Resources.

Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, said perhaps some departmental consolidations could be made but he has made no intensive study along this line.

Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, said perhaps other departments are equipped to deal with energy matters, rather than a Department of Energy. He suggests the Department of Water Resources, for example.

A suggestion for the private sector to be provided incentives and freedom for energy development was posed by Rep. Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, who is also opposed a Department of Energy.

Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, suggested support of a director for such a department, with perhaps one secretary with their main responsibilities centering on handling of petroleum and other fuels allocations.



Lonely Democrats

BOSIE — The only two Democrats from Eastern Idaho in the House delegation of 42 are,

Post-Register photo

from left, Reps. Melvin Hammond, Rexburg, and Wendell Miller, Idaho Falls