

Senate leader foresees little remap problem

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BOISE — Senate Majority Leader Jim Risch, R-Boise, Friday predicted the Idaho Legislature special session will accomplish its legislative and congressional reapportionment within five days.

Risch said in a telephone interview to The Post-Register the special session is scheduled to open Tuesday, July 7, and he feels it should wind up its task by Friday night that same week.

His predictions contrast with those of Gov. John V. Evans who forecast the session could go two weeks.

Risch said the Legislature is not interested in including any requests for supplemental funding, although he agreed with the governor that \$150,000 additional for the Office of Aging to finance home health care for senior citizens can be considered.

"I don't think we have to include many requests for supplemental funding as most of these can wait until the next regular session in January," Risch said. "Both the governor and the Legislature leadership have a long list of requests for inclusion in the special session."

"Regarding reapportionment, Risch noted that in 1966, the Legislature under the U.S. Supreme Court "one man, one vote" rule, decided to create 35 legislative districts from the 44 counties. They reduced the number of senators from 44 to 35 and the number of state representatives from 79 to 70.

"The state has grown to more than 943,000 people, meaning each of the 35 legislative districts must have 26,969 people, said Risch. "The difficulty is that equal growth did not take place in each district. That means changing district boundaries is inevitable."

Risch said problems are going to be caused by places, such as Ada and Kootenai counties, where growth occurred rapidly.

"The trouble will not be in most immediate areas, but in surrounding areas," he said.

He said, for example, Ada County has grown to more than 171,000. The county now has five legislative districts, plus a small portion of District 9 and a larger portion of District 19 in adjacent counties.

Under the new statistics, Ada County will have six entire districts and a portion of at least one more, he said.

"When reapportioning, legislators usually strive to keep the same constituency to whom they had successfully campaigned," said Risch. "On the other hand, they would just as soon give up precincts that have voted against them."

"Another reapportionment concern is that incumbent legislators do not want to run against each other."

Risch said Ada County legislators will have little difficulty in drawing up boundaries because they pick up a new district.

"The problem to solve will be where the new district comes from," said Risch.

Risch said it would be much easier for legislators to deal with regional areas than to grapple with the entire state at once. He said this has been done in his own area, north Idaho, Twin Falls; and in east Idaho only Thursday night.

"For example," he said, "if the eight districts north of the Salmon River are considered together independently the task will be easier. Unfortunately the River River line would require each northern district to take more than 500 fewer people per district than other districts in the state."

"The south may be divided along a line running generally along the eastern boundaries of Idaho, Valley, Boise, Elmore and Owyhee counties," he said. "This would separate that part of the state into 15 districts to the east and 12 districts to the west."

"A slight disparity would occur in the population per district. About the only safe prediction at this point is that reapportionment will be accomplished. If legislators could do it in 1966 by reducing 44 districts to 35, then we certainly can live with the more mental problems of shifting boundaries."

Risch said most legislators feel districts should not vary more than 5 percent from each other, or about 1,400 from the statewide legislative average of 26,969.