

# The Post-Register

## The political pulse

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Legislative limelights...

# Hansen redistricting preference is sensible

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The preference of Rep. George V. Hansen to equalize the two congressional districts in Idaho by shifting some 21,000 people in Ada County from the 1st District to the 2nd District appears the most logical and simple.

His statement thus likely torpedoes any plans to place Ada County in one district, rather than continuing the present division of the county.

Some legislators, among them Senate Minority Leader Ron J. Twilegar, D-Boise, have preferred Ada being placed in just the 1st congressional district.

Furthermore, Idaho's other congressman, Larry Craig, has indicated he favors such a transfer as preferred by Hansen.

The 1980 census showed Idaho's population grew by 32.4 percent in the past decade, or from 713,008 in 1970 to 943,936, the seventh fastest growing state in the nation. As a result, the 1st District population is now 492,688 while the 2nd District is only 471,247. It thus will require shifting some 21,000 from the 1st District to the 2nd District to equalize the two.

The 1st District embraces the state in west and north Idaho, including most of Ada County. The 2nd District includes the remainder of the state from Ada County east but also covers some northern and eastern sections of Boise in Ada.

The present figures indicate Ada County has 171,000 population, of which about 136,000 are presently in the 1st District and 35,000 in the 2nd. Transferring some 21,000 to the 2nd district would then mean some 115,000 would remain in the 1st and 56,000 would be placed in the 2nd.

The perfect division would place 471,968 in each district, and it will be the legislators' aim to reach as close to this as possible.

Hansen dug up more figures to show the 1st District grew by 38.1 percent, mostly in Boise, Caldwell, Nampa and Coeur d'Alene. The 2nd District increased by 26.7 percent, mostly in Boise, Idaho Falls, Pocatello, Jerome, Rexburg and Sun Valley areas.

Hansen said further that when the congressional districts were divided for the last time following the 1970 census, there were 356,859 in the 1st District and 356,149 in the 2nd District.

Hansen's assertions that it is common for more than one congressman to come the same city refutes the argument Ada County should not be divided. For example, he said, some 20 congressmen represent Los Angeles, and this could apply to many of the larger and middle size cities.

With Ada accounting for nearly a fifth of the state's population there would be an advantage for the capital city to have a strong voice and political input in both congressional districts.

Twilegar has shown keen interest in reapportionment and even went so far as to concoct one plan that would have grouped all South Idaho counties between Bannock and the Oregon line in one district. That would have placed all East Idaho counties north of Pocatello, along with north Idaho, in a separate district. It would have even lumped Hansen and Craig in the same district, a situation that blasts such a ludicrous plan. Even Twilegar admitted it had no chance.

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There could be some interesting political developments spring from the transfer because Hansen has never won Ada County. For example, in 1980 when he was opposed by a comparatively weak candidate, Democrat Diane Bilyeu, Pocatello, in the 32 precincts in the 2nd District in Ada County, he lost 7,107 to 10,229. It was by far the poorest he ran in any sections of his district despite a strong Republican tide.

Many political observers believe by transferring 21,000 more Ada voters from the 1st to the 2nd, will further weaken Hansen in future elections.

Past election records show some 40 percent or more of the voters automatically oppose Hansen, regardless of who is the Democratic candidate. In this respect, he is something like former Democrat Sen. Frank Church who generally was opposed by 40 percent or more voters, regardless who was the Republican nominee. Look what finally happened to him in the 1980 election.

A strong Democrat, such as Sen. Israel Merrill, Blackfoot, or Department of Law Enforcement Director Kelly Pearce, Boise — the two most prominently mentioned now — could place Hansen in a vulnerable position.

However, Hansen also has a card up his sleeve. He explains he has never campaigned strenuously in Ada because of the comparatively small number of voters in his district and didn't feel justified in spending extensively for newspaper and television ads. The transfer, however, he said, would influence him to campaign more extensively.

Hansen suggests a natural barrier in Ada as a dividing line, such as the Boise River or the Interstate Highway. He would suggest this area to the south and maybe Owyhee County be shifted to his district. This, of course, contains the more rural voters who may be inclined to favor Hansen more readily than their Boise metropolitan cousins. This, however, might not set too well with Craig who feels these voters are also sympathetic to him. Craig didn't exactly run sensationally in Ada, either. He won only 33,092 over Democrat Glen Nichols' 30,859, despite a strong Reagan Republican tide.

Thus, interesting possibilities are offered for redistricting the two congressional districts, along with those of legislative reapportionment.