The Post-Register

The political pulse

Legislative limelights...

Governor will insist on DHW region bosses

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Gov. John V. Evans can't do much about the deep legislative cuts for the 1982 fiscal budget but he can insist under the Idaho Constitution that he has the executive powers to administer the state agencies as he sees fit.

As such, his charge -- that the Republican controlled Legislature, particularly the Joint Finance Appropriation, intruded on the executive branch in seeking to cut out 70 Department of Health and Welfare regional administrative and management positions -- carries justification.

He has vowed to maintain this regional administration system, even though it will be done on a skeletal basis with the funds available.

The governor compares the DHW management to those of a chain company, which has a manager for each of its stores. He contends the state operates in the same way.

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The latest plan unveiled by the DHW executives to reinstate 35 of the 70 persons in regional administrations gives an inkling of what is going on. It no doubt has the blessings of the governor.

Last week, the DHW executive board made up of the state director, deputy director, six division heads and the seven regional direcgors, discussed three alternative plans as result of underfunding: for all supervision to remain in the central office at Boise; another that retains regional control as much as allowed within the budget limitations; and a third, a combination of the first two.

It becomes apparent that the plan for regional supervision is preferred. This calls for retaining five positions in each of the seven regions, a total of 35, cutting in half the present system. To be retained would be the administrator, secretary, personnnel director, purchasing officer and fee collector. In addition, the 35 positions will be made up by cutting the central administrative office staff at Boise.

The regional system, which has worked well in the past, was set up by Gov. Cecil D. Andrus when he was governor to give greater voice and input on the local level. The Republican effort was designed to remove this local control which is contrary to established political principles in Idaho.

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The Republican contention that such cuts were necessary because of lack of revenue would carry justification except for a main factor. The deepest slashes were made against programs the Republican leadership has opposed for years: DHW human services, air quality, water quality, public television and some fields of both public and higher education which were considered frills.

It's significant the legislators took care of their own. They appropriated $3,399,400 for the legislative branch, a 6.2 percent increase over the current year.

The Republican leadership closed its eyes and ears to the possibility that the state revenue was on the upswing, preferring to hew at the rock bottom projections of $422 million. Many will blush when they find there is a surplus of at least $15 million and perhaps over $20 million by the end of the fiscal year June 30.

There are those who say DHW is circumventing legislative intent by reinstating half of the regional DHW management but is it the legislative prerogative to interfere with management matters?

Many of those cuts barely passed the Legislature.

A letter of intent written by Sen. John Barker, R-Buhl, chairman of the Senate Health, Education and Welfare Committee, and Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the House Health and Welfare, recommended the DHW regional administrative system be retained. It passed the Senate 20-15 but was kept bottled in the House committee because of poltical horsetrading. It showed the Republican leadership did not have full support in some of its budget slashings.

The interesting questions is posed as to whether such cuts would have been made if there were a Republican governor. Based on past records, these same JFAC "dirty dozen" headed by Sen. Dean Van Engelen, R-Burley, in all its wisdom likely would have accepted a higher revenue projection.

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In Idaho Falls, the DHW regional administrative staff of 10 will be cut in half, just as is the case in the six other regions.

Now it must be realized that this supervisory personnel has seniority. This will result in the management personnel taking lower paying jobs, forcing those with less skill and seniority out of their positions. As usual, the little one at the bottom who probably needs the job is thus forced out and field service for those who need it will be trimmed.

In Idaho Falls, as well as the remainder of the state, the DHW personnel morale is so low that many have already left and a number of others are looking elsewhere. Others are waiting to see what happens.

Reports indicate the present 2,500 DHW employees will be trimmed by 230, in addition to some 124 positions presently vacant.

Also in Idaho Falls, the entire substance abuse staff of 14 is wiped out, which prompted Rep. Kearnes, to express fear that juvenile crime will experience a sharp upswing.

In fact, Max Brand, director at the Youth Training Center at St. Anthony, reported admittances have sharply increased in recent weeks. The center population is now 175, a hike of 30 over only two months ago, Worse yet, he fears the abrupt gains will continue to escalate in the future.

Perhaps the governor can ask the Legislature to pump supplemental funding to some of these programs during the proposed special session in July to primarily handle reapportionment. If not, there is going to be much suffering among the aged, poor, sick and disabled.