Legislative limelights...

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Regional redistricting efforts invite trouble

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The current efforts of legislators meeting on a regional basis to make their own reapportionment plans can only bring trouble for the special Legislature session to open July 7.

This has been encouraged by Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs; Majority Leader Jim Risch, R-Boise; Rep. Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot, and a number of others with the belief it could help smooth the difficult task of changing boundaries. As a result some legislators are meeting to draft their own proposals affecting their own region, somewhat ignoring what may happen in other regions of the state.

For example, Boise area representatives have already decided to go ahead with a plan to add another legislative district or more to its area as a result of increased population. Twin Falls and north Idaho lawmakers are working on their own proposals, while eastern Idaho legislators are scheduled to meet June 18 in Blackfoot to set up their proposals.

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Such regional planning is counter productive as the legislative reapportionment is statewide, not regional. For example, the new legislative district proposed for the Boise area must take away from another area. How can this come about if the regional legislators are going about remapping on the assumption they will all have the same number of districts? It's obvious the new legislative district in Boise must come from the more sparsely populated areas of other sections.

A previous column indicated the population of the 10 eastern Idaho counties embracing the present six legislative districts just about averages out the statewide legislative population of 26,969 in each of the 35 districts. However, there are wide diffences, ranging for a low 20,815 in District 30, the central section of Idaho Falls and Shelley, to a high 33,222 in District 31, the sububran area east of the city and Teton County.

Yet, it is possible that for each district in eastern Idaho to settle near the average, it may be necessary to go outside the 10 counties for adjustment. The same applies for other regions of the state.

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In previous reapportionments for 1970, following the "one man, one vote" rule of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1965, the Legislature created special committees. They found by working on a statewide map, without regards to regional areas, they were able to come up with a plan that met the citeria of the courts.

Young, for example, is spearheading the reapportionment proposals for eastern Idaho but he will find difficulty in attempting to harmonize the boundaries with adjacent districts.

House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, is likely more correct in expressing no interest in pre-legislative reapportionment meetings but instead to wait until the 105 legislators, in all their wisdom, gather at Boise to hammer out their plan. At present there likely are 105 plans — one for each legislator — plus others concocted by the governor and other elective officials.

As an example, the 10 eastern Idaho counties are not a complete entity of their own. Aberdeen in Bingham County is part of District 35, in Bannock County.

If each region comes up with a plan to protect its own legislators, then this could create more problems than it solves. Most district boundaries will be changed and it is only natural for the legislators to favor alterations they believe will help perpetuate them in office.