

East Idaho to undergo no drastic legislative remapping

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A cursory survey indicates the six legislative districts embracing 10 east Idaho counties will undergo some boundary changes among themselves but no drastic upheaval.

This is indicated in figures given by Myran H. Schlechte, Boise, director of the Legislative Council, which is delegated with furnishing all the data when the Idaho Legislature convenes July 7 to handle congressional and legislative district reapportionment based on the 1980 census.

Idaho's population increased from 713,000 in 1970 to 943,939 in 1980, or 32.6, the seventh fastest growing state in the nation.

In doing so, it boosted the population ratio for each of the 35 legislative districts in the state from 20,370 to 26,969.

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A compilation shows the 10 east Idaho counties kept pace with the state growth, although there were deviations among the districts. The six legislative districts embracing the 10 east Idaho counties now have a population of 161,746. This divided by six, averages to 26,959 per district, or almost on the nose of the statewide 26,969.

The breakdowns list District 20 embracing Jefferson, Clark, Lemhi and Custer counties, almost perfect with 26,947 population; District 27 embracing all of Bingham County except Shelley and Aberdeen, 27,152; District 28, Madison and Fremont counties, 28,268;

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District 29, west Bonneville and Butte, 25,342; District 30, central Bonneville and Shelley, only 20,815, and District 31, east Bonneville and Teton, the most tremendous growth with 33,222.

In east Idaho, District 20 likely will be left as it is, while the major changes will involve shifting some 7,000 from District 31 to District 30, with minor transfer of rural Shelley precincts in District 27 to District 29. Some 1,500 in District 28 also must be parceled out to adjacent districts.

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Schlechte said most of the 35 legislative districts are not near the 26,969 median, ranging from a low of only 17,930 in District 34, downtown Pocatello, to a high of 44,693 in District 2, embracing most of Kootenai County of which Coeur d'Alene is the county seat.

The overall readjustments indicated Ada County with some

171,000 population will get at least another legislative district at the expense of some rural districts in north Idaho and some in central Idaho.

Schlechte noted the U.S. Supreme Court has never fully defined the differential ranges among legislative districts, except they "follow a rational state policy." Most legislators in the past have felt there should be no more than a 5 percent difference, which would place this at no more than 1,500 people from any district to another.

Schlechte said legislators among the various regions have been encouraged to discuss the boundary changes. For example, Ada legislators under Majority Senate Leader James Risch, R-Boise, already are discussing boundary changes in the Boise area to add one more district; Twin Falls lawmakers and north Idaho lawmakers are viewing possible changes in their respective regions.

In southeast Idaho from Pocatello south, Senate President Pro Ten Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs; and Rep. Myron Jones, R-Malad, are studying changes.

As far as is known, east Idaho legislators have not seriously discussed their legislative reapportionment suggestions.

Schlechte said the Legislative Council already has compiled the latest census figures and official maps by precincts, districts, counties and state. These are now available for preliminary study and when the Legislature formally convenes.

Some talk of changing the number of legislative districts from the present 35 appears to have met with cool reception. This would necessitate discarding the present boundaries and starting all over. For one thing, there is the physical problem of seating more than 70 state representatives in the House. It's certain the number of legislative districts would not be reduced because no state representative will vote for a plan that would eliminate his job, not by a long shot.

Schlechte dug back in the record books and found there were a record 79 state representatives in 1965, two for most of the 44 counties regardless of size, but the Supreme Court "one man, one vote" ruling brought the drastic changes the following year. In fact, the Legislature needed to meet a couple of times in special sessions to meet the court criteria.

The only other major reapportionment is for congressional districts. Most agree the most simple action would be the shifting of some 20,000 residents in Ada County from the 1st District to the 2nd District. Some Ada County legislators are objecting to further splitting their county, especially Senate Minority Leader Ron J. Twilegar, D-Boise. However, any other boundary changes would be far more complicated. At present the 1st District has about 40,000 more than the 2nd District which embraces south Idaho from Boise east. However, it includes about 20,000 people in the northern and eastern sections of Boise.