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The political pulse

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Section D

The 1981 Idaho Legislature...

Solons strongly back Right to Work law

(Editor's note: this is the 14th in a series of 16 articles giving the views of East Idaho legislators and the leadership on the salient issues shaping up for the coming session. This is on the Right to Work law.)

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With very few exceptions, East Idaho legislators and the leadership strongly favor enactment of a Right to Work Law, an issue that has been kicked around in each session for the past quarter of century.

The only question among some is whether the legislators should enact a state law outright or placed it before a vote of the people.

This proposal was voted on by the people in the 1952 election and was defeated narrowly 120,077 against to 115,765 in favor.

In recent years, Democratic governors had indicated they would veto such legislation, and this includes Gov. John V. Evans.

Two versions of Right to Work legislation passed the Idaho House and Senate in 1977 but both died when a legislative conference committee failed to reach agreement.

Rep. John Brooks, R-Gooding, has led a movement for such a law in recent years but he decided in the last two sessions he would not vigorously press for legislation, although bills were drafted.

The entire leadership, and this includes House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, said, in responding to a Post-Register questionnaire, they favor Right to Work legislation. Hammond said he prefers that it be submitted to a vote of the people but that he would vote for a state law.

Also most of them indicate opposition to compulsory arbitration.

Sen. William Floyd, R-Idaho Falls, a newly elected legislator who ousted the veteran Democrat Sen. Richard A. Egbert, D-Tetonia, in the last election, said he "wanted to study any proposal with an open minded approach." Floyd, a home builder, said he could "appreciate position on both sides."

Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, and Rep.

Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, said if such a proposal is submitted they favor it going to a vote of the people.

Most of the others lawmakers, however, support a state law, although if this is not possible, than a vote of the people for a constitutional amendment.

The issue is likely to be one of the bitterest and most emotional to be fought in the Legislature.

Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, in giving his support, commented that he also opposed compulsory arbitration, especially when it relates to Idaho school boards. In this, he apparently referred to the acrimonious exchanges that took place recently between teachers and the school board in Jefferson County on negotiating for new teachers contracts.

Most of the legislators in expressing their backing for Right to Work underscored the theme it was the worker's freedom to choose.

Rep. Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot, assistant majority leader, said he opposes compulsory arbitration for public employees.

Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, contended "such a law would help attract more business expansion to the state, thus providing more jobs."

In favoring support, Rep. Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, said, "Laborers in past times have been taken advantage of, but through laws designed to protect them, unions have in many cases gained too much power over individuals and the general public in contradiction to freedom and elective rights."

Sens. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, and J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, favored state legislation, rather than a vote of the people.

Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, said he supports the Right to Work Law as he has done in the past and also opposes collective bargaining and binding arbitrations for public employees.

"These items could put school trustees, county and city officials in an untenable position if they were forced to meet the demands of public employees and tax revenues were not adequate, Sessions said.