Williams raps Legislature for hampering his office

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State Auditor Joe Williams, who has served as an elected state official longer than anyone in the state's history, but who considers himself still young at 77, took time out Friday to rap the Idaho Legislature for what he said was taking away some of his duties.

Joe Williams

Williams, a Democrat, has served 24 years and seeks his seventh four-year term against the announced challenge of State Sen. Dean Van Engelen, R-Burley.

Williams was in Idaho Falls Thursday and Friday to conduct sale of nine parcels of state land and the response he receives on them will determine if the state will continue these land sales during the present economic slump. He pointed out there have been plans for delaying these sales if there is a lack of demand.

Williams, who is one of the top vote getters in the state and won every county in the 1978 election, said the State Legislature established Legislative Auditor Office directed presently by John Balderson which largely duplicates what he does.

"It has added expenses of several hundreds of thousands of dollars," said Willams.

He said the Legislative Auditor is doing a post audit of all state directors which is really a statutory prerogative of the state auditor.

Williams said many of the legislative offices under jurisdiction of the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee are duplications of state offices and unnecessary. He said about the only exception is the Legislsative Council under Myran H. Schelechte.

Williams said he has asked the Legislature to consolidate all auditing fnctions of state government under his office. He asserted the state could save $515,000 by merging the Legislative Auditor's Office with his own.

"I plan to take this issue to the voters," said Williams.

Williams labeled as unnecessary not only the Legislative Auditor but also the Legislative Fiscal Office under John Andreason which duplicates the budget setting of the governor's office..

Aside from this duplication, Williams said he thought the Idaho Legislature did well in financing the coming year's budget with the money available.

On land sales, Williams said it is much more profitable to sell the land than lease it because the state gets four or more times the amount of interest, plus the fact the land in place on the tax rolls.

Williams said the state has sold close to a million acres of land, much of it farmland, but still has some two million more to sell.

In other matters, Williams said the state has now virtually completed the acquisition from the federal govenrment of land it has been due since Idaho became a state.

He said of some 38,000 acres, all except 8,000 acres have been given to the state. The others are held up because of mineral rights and other legal complications.

In addition to 24 years as state auditor, Williams also has served six years in addition as a deputy.