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The political pulse

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Appointments loom as top partisan issue

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What hadn't even been mentioned at the start now appears the leading partisan issue to be handled by the Idaho Legislature.

It is the appointments by Democratic Gov. John V. Evans of Robert Saxvik, his chief administrative assistant, and Chris Carlson, former press secretary and regional administrator to Cecil D. Andrus, former U.S. secretary of interior and former Idaho governor, as Idaho's representatives to the Pacific Northwest Electric Power and Conservation Planning Council.

Republican state Attorney General David Leroy, frequently mentioned as a gubernatorial candidate, and the leadership of the Republican Senate leadership are the key figures in opposing Evans' action. The action likely will bring a sharp split between the Republicans and the outvoted Democrats, who up to now have been enjoying unparalleled harmonious relations.

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Last week, Leroy opened the fireworks at the prodding of Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, by issuing an opinion to the effect the governor was overstepping his bounds in making the appointments without the consent of the Legislature. He quoted court cases to substantiate his findings.

This week, the Senate Republicans are considering a bill that would curtail Evans' power to make the appointments. Among the restrictions contemplated are to require Senate confirmation, such as also contained in the Leroy opinion; require one of the appointments be a Republican; specify a three-year term rather than the present indefinite length of office; lower the salaries from \$50,000 to \$32,000, the same as received by IPUC members; and require an annual report to the Idaho Legislature.

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Carlson, who served as Andrus regional administrator at Seattle the past year and was close in writing a draft of the council bill, said the governor was within his rights to name the Idaho repre-

sentatives. He insisted the bill, as drafted, gives Evans that prerogative.

Evans also claims he has the right under his executive order privilege.

Senate Majority Leader James Risch, R-Boise, in an interview with this writer, correctly predicted this issue may be the hottest in this session, even superseding Right to Work and Sagebrush Rebellion, two issues considered among the most emotional.

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This issue has considerable legal ramifications and could wind up with neither the governor nor the Legislature making the appointment, but rather the federal government, meaning particularly Secretary of Interior James Watt.

Under questioning at a press conference, Leroy acknowledged that if the state appointments are not settled by June 30, then the state appointment rights become void.

This could be highly probable if the case is bounced to federal court. Such a court likely would take weeks, perhaps months, to settle the controversy.

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Both Saxvik and Carlson have considerable expertise to serve as council members. Saxvika formerly state senator from Burley but has worked closely on public power matters as the governor's chief assistant. Carlson, as one of Andrus' top staffman at Seattle, also has been closely associated with the northwest power picture.

The Eastern Idaho Council of Industry and Energy raised a question about the qualifications of the two appointees in criticizing the governor for what they thought was premature action. It's true that both Saxvik and Carlson are "political animals" as was charged but no one can say they lack high qualifications.

The only danger is the possibility the present squabble doesn't destroy the present harmonious relations in the Senate — a drastic turnover from recent years — and that Idaho's voice on the council isn't seriously impaired by federal appointments.