

Lenaghan confirmation to furnish fireworks

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

The vote on confirmation of Robert Lenaghan, president of the Idaho Public Utilities Commission, for another six-year term will be closely watched for political aftermaths.

Most political observers believe the vote may be close, but this writer feels that unless there should be some unforeseen development, Lenaghan may be confirmed by a fairly comfortable margin.

Lenaghan won confirmation six years ago by a single vote in one of the most hotly contested senatorial scraps ever.

But since that time, Lenaghan has come a long ways. Offsetting this to some extent, the Idaho Senate has assumed a more conservative hue.

Lenaghan is an honest but blunt-speaking public official who sometimes ruffles the feelings of those with whom he deals.

In the six years he has served, and particularly the last four years, he has been the moving force that has changed the IPUC from little more than a tool of the privately owned utilities to one that is truly representing the consumers.

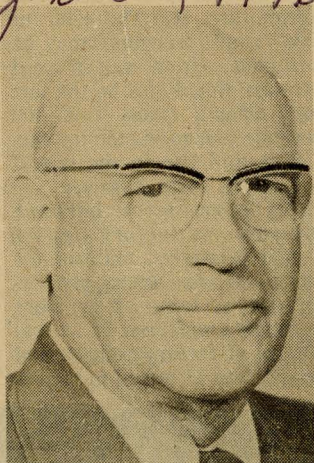
He has expressed himself in strong terms when he feels utility requests are unjustified and misrepresented.

His activities last fall in East Idaho won him hundreds of followers among farmers and power users, who generally lean Republican. In fact, his efforts no doubt cut Republican gubernatorial Allan Larsen's margin in East Idaho.

Lenaghan pointed out the IPUC is also limited in its authority, that it can't arbitrarily approve or disapprove rates without justification. That's why he was miffed when the House turned down some \$700,000 in funding that would have enabled the IPUC to verify rate increase claims of the public utilities. The funding would have permitted hiring some 19 technicians to help the IPUC, and might have saved consumers hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The IPUC won wide support in East Idaho last fall when it rejected Utah Power and Light Co.'s request for a 52 percent increase in power rates and a fantastic 90 percent hike for irrigators. Instead, it granted only a modest 13.7 percent hike.

Voting with Lenaghan is Conley Ward, attorney, while a Republican appointee, Ralph



Robert Lenaghan

Wickberg, who has served for some 16 years, leans decidedly toward the utilities. Ward has served only two years after appointment by Democratic Gov. Cecil D. Andrus.

Larsen lost a lot of points when he said he would not reappoint Lenaghan if elected. Evans backed Lenaghan and has sent to the Senate his name to serve another six-year term.

The Senate State Affairs Committee will hold a hearing Feb. 5 on the confirmation before sending it to the full Senate for vote.

Senate Minority Leader Cy Chase, D-St. Maries, said he will ask for an early vote, believing the Republicans may want to delay for bargaining powers on other legislation.

An analysis indicates that Lenaghan will win all 16 Democratic votes and has an excellent change of winning the support of Republican moderates, among them Sen. Richard High, Twin Falls, John Barker, Buhl; Edith Klein, Boise, and perhaps Wilson Steen, Glenns Ferry, Larry Craig, Midvale and even John Risch, Boise.

Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, Soda Springs, is Lenaghan's most avowed enemy but in this issue, he does not appear to have wide Republican backing, not by a long shot. Even Steen and Risch, who are in the leadership, are possible Lenaghan votes.

In fact, if East Idaho Republican senators vote against the confirmation, it would be counter to many of their constituents.

Perhaps Sens. Dane Watkins and J. Marsden Williams, Idaho Falls, and Mark Ricks, Rexburg, might even consider the fact that their constituents appreciate Lenaghan's efforts in their behalf. The other East

Idaho Republican senator, Vearl Crystal, Rigby, has a record of headline party vote.

Lenaghan has a long record of public service, and wherever he has gone, there has always been action. He's that type of a feisty individual, but he's sincere and honest in what he does.

He is a native of Boise, graduating from old Star High School. He took special finance and management courses at Seattle University, Reed College and Lewis and Clark.

He served in the U.S. Navy in World War II, seeing action in the Asiatic Theater and left the service with the rating of warrant tender second class.

He filled executive posts of the AFL-CIO, first at Boise and then at Pocatello from 1949 to 1970. In 1959, he served in the House of Representatives in the 35th session.

He then served as director of administration 1971-73 and was credited in greatly upgrading the department before he was appointed to the IPUC. He has served on many task forces in the field of employment, education and industry.

Now he is 59, and his IPUC salary is \$28,000, which is far from the top level for a position of that importance.

"It's not in the top 100 positions of the state," Lenaghan comments.

Lenaghan points with pride to his past record of public services. He faces the confirmation test with confidence. At this point, he has every reason to expect success, but there will be lots of hide taken off before the vote is over with.