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Legislative limelights . . .

Reapportionment fuss was effort in futility

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BOISE — Whatever happens in the current Idaho legislative reapportionment struggle it can be assumed now that the latest plan approved by the Legislature will not change much, if any.

Why Gov. John V. Evans listened to his Democratic henchmen to stamp an ill-advised veto for the second time is incomprehensible. The governor and the Democrats know they will not get a significantly better plan, regardless of whether the controversy is bounced to the federal courts or another new plan is devised.

There are a number of proposals now floating about in the Legislature that could be considered but time is short.

Many legislators are nervous because they don't know the exact boundaries of their districts. Nearly all of them undergo changes under the new plan, although they are minor in a number of cases, such as those in east Idaho north of Shelley.

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To reopen the entire reapportionment proposal at this date could be disastrous. These were thoroughly discussed in the July special session and were rejected, such as a plan for 36 instead of 35 legislative districts proposed by Rep. Morgan Munger, R-Ola, and Harold Reid, D-Craigmont. Actually they are promoting this plan to largely keep their own districts largely intact and make it easier for their re-election.

That's the prevailing syndrome in the Legislature: each lawmaker looks at the plan as to how it will affect him, largely ignoring the statewide picture.

The same goes for the governor who is naturally interested in getting as many Democrats elected as possible to support his programs.

Already county election clerks are nervous no plan has been devised. Ron Longmore, Bonneville County clerk, said he has lined up 250 registrars and election members to serve, along with arranging polling places.

The same situation is true for other counties of the state.

The veto, despite somber predictions by some Republican leaders to the contrary, will not greatly hurt Evans politically for the simple reason that most Idahoans care little about reapportionment.

Perhaps the most serious charge against Evans is one that the veto is generally impeding progress of the Legislature and planning for the May primary election.

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There are two drastic flaws in the past and current reapportionment which likely will not be corrected for a few years down the road—but they will come eventually. The first is the obvious efforts of the rural legislators to deprive the cities of their rightful voice, and the second is a apparent slant in many districts favoring the Republicans.

The latest reapportionment plan comes well within the guidelines established by federal courts in past rulings. In fact, it likely is one of

the closest equalization percentagewise of any in the nation. There is no district more than 2.66 percent below or 2.68 percent in population above the legislative statewide average of 26,969. This is a spread of only 5.35, twice better than present one of more than 10 percent differential reapportionment. It was finally approved some seven years ago after a court wrangle and special legislative sessions following the 1970 census.

In past rulings, courts have allowed a 10 percent spread, and in some cases, considerably more.

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Actually the worst discrepancies are not in the Pocatello district but in the fast growing Boise area. Boise, by all facts, should have been given a legislative district outright but instead three Boise metropolitan districts were dispersed into three outlying rural areas. Giving the Boise area a district would have minimized boundary changes in other legislative districts.

There are also some grotesque boundaries in Districts 2, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9 in north Idaho which are much worse than in Pocatello. They are made to avoid splitting Lewiston, Moscow and Coeur d' Alene.

The eight largest counties of the state account for two-thirds of the population but the municipal voice is short-changed in Boise, Pocatello, Idaho Falls, Twin Falls, Coeur d'Alene, Lewiston and other of the larger population centers.

The party imbalance in the Legislature is also brought in stark relief. Past election records show that the Democratic vote is roughly about 40 percent. Yet the Legislature has 56 Republicans and 14 Democrats in the House and 23 Republicans and 12 Democrats in the Senate. This totals 79 Republicans and only 26 Democrats, or about 75 percent Republican.

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There are also charges some Democrats hope to force a delay of the primary to July or August which they believe would work in favor of Evans. That's because the Republican nominee, whether it be Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt or House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, would have less time to campaign after a bitter primary and with unhealed party wounds.