

Legislative limelights . . .

Swisher cool nuclear views draw concern

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

The cool views expressed by Perry Swisher, Lewiston newspaperman, toward nuclear power development raises concern for his confirmed appointment to the Idaho Public Utilities Commission.

The matter came up Thursday morning in the Greater Idaho Falls Chamber of Commerce legislative forum, when one of the panelists speaking via telephone hookup from the Statehouse, Rep. C. Wendell Miller, D-Idaho Falls, charged that Swisher is anti-nuclear.

Miller observed the House did not vote on confirmation, but that if it did, he would vote against Swisher. That's a strong statement to make from a legislator who is a member of the same party as Gov. John V. Evans.

Miller was one of the top candidates considered for the appointment, but there were about 50 in all, according to the governor.

At the same meeting, Sen. Richard A. Egbert, D-Tetonia, also expressed reservations, while Sen. Wilson Steen, R-Glenns Ferry, the Senate assistant majority leader, correctly predicted no problems in Swisher's confirmation by the Senate.

Swisher was confirmed by an unanimous voice vote in the Senate Thursday.

A check with Swisher at his Lewiston home indicates that he is less than enthusiastic over nuclear power, but whether he is anti-nuclear as Miller charged, remains to be seen.

Swisher said in interviews at Boise following the appointment by Evans Wednesday, that he felt technology has not moved as fast as expected.

"In handling of nuclear waste," Swisher told this writer, "I don't feel technology has solved the problem. Until that happens, it would be a matter of pre-judgment to expect nuclear energy would meet our power needs."

He then pointed out that as late as three or four years ago, it was felt a dozen more new nuclear plants would be constructed, but that last year only one or two were under construction.

Swisher then accused this writer of provincialism on behalf of the East Idaho nuclear community, adding, "I have to be honest on this. Until technology can handle the (radioactive) waste problem, I can't be



IPUC member

PERRY SWISHER, Lewiston editor, a former 12-year legislator serving as both a Democrat and Republican, has been confirmed by the Senate to the Idaho Public Utilities Commission, replacing the controversial Robert Lenaghan. Swisher expressed less than enthusiastic support for nuclear power.

a chamber of commerce, and say 'hurrah for nuclear power.' "

It appears Swisher is aping President Carter on nuclear power.

Swisher is a free thinker in his own right based on his past record. His performances on the important IPUC might make even the controversial and blunt-speaking Robert Lenaghan look pale by comparison. Lenaghan, president of the IPUC the past six years, failed to win reconfirmation by the Senate on a straight partyline 19-16 vote with all Republicans in opposition.

Evans has always been a warm booster of the future of nuclear energy. In fact, it was Evans who booted out Earl Adams as director of the Office of Energy two years ago because of his strong anti-nuclear views and replaced him with Kirk Hall. Adams had been appointed to the post by Democrat Gov. Cecil D. Andrus.

How Swisher's less than warm support for nuclear energy sits with Evans remains to be seen.

Swisher, now 55, has a rather checkered record.

He was engaged as publisher of a weekly newspaper in Pocatello starting in 1943, served as a Republican legislator in Democratic-ribbed Bannock County in the House 1952-58 and in Senate 1962-66, then ran as an independent for governor in 1966 and finished a bad last in a

three-man race.

He then changed parties, and as a Democrat served in the House 1975-76. It was after this he accepted his present position as night managing editor for the Lewiston Morning Tribune in January, 1977.

Evans had indicated he preferred an East Idahoan on the IPUC, which hasn't had a representative for many years. Now a North Idahoan with what appears less than sympathetic views for this area takes Lenaghan's place.

Stan Kress, the Firth school superintendent, former state senator and who lost two Second District congressional races; Sen. Israel Miller, D-Blackfoot; Miller and Irene Beard, Rigby housewife and active civic workers, were among those near top of the list for consideration by Evans.

It was recalled that Lenaghan effectively during the past campaign refuted charges that he was not sympathetic to the nuclear community by producing evidence he had years earlier devised future nuclear plans. Lenaghan was always a strong East Idaho backer in IPUC matters.

It is understandable that the Senate hurriedly confirmed Swisher by a voice vote Thursday. The disgraceful and blatant partisan way in which the Republican senators rejected Lenaghan left a legacy of bitterness that hampered and delayed the entire Legislature to this day.