

# Task force DHW aims would nullify reform

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By **BEN J. PLASTINO**  
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Recommendations by the Governor's Management Task Force for the Department of Health and Welfare regional reorganization appears a half step backwards after a full step forward was taken in 1972.

Gov. Cecil D. Andrus, recognizing the need for more local service in regions with common interests, issued an executive order April 3, 1972, which created the present seven regions with headquarters in Coeur d'Alene, Lewiston, Nampa-Caldwell, Boise, Twin Falls, Pocatello and Idaho Falls.

The setup has worked effectively and coordinates with similar regional organizations for Public Health Districts, judicial districts, highway districts and others on the state level.

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The task force was made up of 24 persons headed by Thomas C. Frye, Boise banker, chairman, all coming from the business community and none whose names are recognizable for high public statewide service.

The committee, attempting to cover the spectrum of vast statewide government, admittedly gave little more than superficial attention. In its letter last month to the governor, it even stated "the limited exposure afforded by 10 weeks of intensive study does not qualify the task force as experts in government." Its recommendations should thus be viewed in this light.

The task force made the common mistake so many are guilty of believing that because two areas are located geographically together they have the same interest. Such is not the case. There are wide cultural, economic and political differences between Coeur d'Alene and Lewiston, between Idaho Falls and Pocatello, and even between Caldwell-Nampa and Boise.

The committees recommendations would cut the regional districts from seven to four, half undoing the excellent reform Andrus accomplished seven years ago.

It would lump Coeur d'Alene and Lewiston in one region; Boise and Caldwell-Nampa, with twice the population of other regions in a second; leave the small region of Twin Falls alone in a third because of its geographical isolation; and then combine Pocatello and Idaho Falls in a fourth. The present seven regions have about 120,000 population each except Boise with 190,000.

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Terry Reilly, of the Consolidated Hospitals at Caldwell, was the committee member who had the greatest input in the DHW recommendations.

He said the committee's aim was primarily to seek recommendations to improve "efficiency and save costs," and in this it must be highly commended.

Reilly contends management personnel would be reduced from 70 to 49, saving an estimated \$554,000. He asserted it

would not reduce field service to people, that only management would be cut.

Reilly reveals glaring deficiencies because he said the recommendations calls for 13 management persons in each of three districts and 10 in Twin Falls. Yet, the proposed Boise district would have two and one half times more population, and the Twin Falls district would have only half the population of each of the Idaho Falls-Pocatello and Lewiston-Coeur d'Alene districts. Twin Falls would be only a third in size of the Boise district.

A deeper scrutiny reveals other serious fallacies. Already the DHW underwent extensive reorganization to cut management to the bare bones, stretching their duties and responsibilities almost to the breaking point. Another slash could bring turmoil and disruptions.

The central DHW offices at Boise already has lopped 48 since January, and, admittedly, there was some fat. Maybe there still is. Each region has trimmed many people so that it is operating at a minimum level.

For example, the proposed one East Idaho district would stretch from Preston to Salmon and embrace an area of contrasting needs. Either Jerry Harris, of the Pocatello district, or David Groberg, of the Idaho Falls district, who know the peculiar problems of their district, would be dropped.

Asked what would happen to these highly qualified management people, Reilly blithely answered they would be fired or maybe reemployed in a

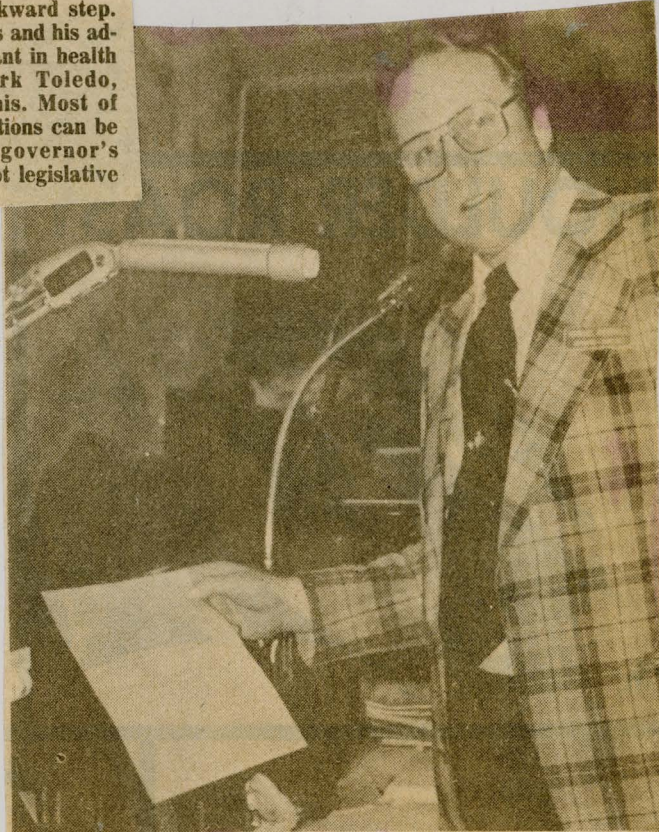
minor position.

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**Reduction of unnecessary personnel is one thing but losing people of value when they are so badly needed is another.**

All of the DHW people contacted from high state to regional level says the reduced administration would bring a drastic cut in local service. That's the bottom line.

The recommendations look good on paper but in actual practice it's a backward step. Gov. John V. Evans and his administrative assistant in health and welfare, Mark Toledo, should consider this. Most of these recommendations can be invoked by the governor's executive order, not legislative action.



**Blackfoot senator**

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STATE SEN. W. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, is the ranking minority member of the Senate Health, Education and Welfare Committee which is keenly interested in proposed reorganization of the Department of Health and Welfare.