

Legislative limelights . . .

Office of Energy slim funding to haunt GOP

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The failure of the Republican controlled Idaho Legislature to adequately fund the Office of Energy for political reasons has crippled the state's ability to cope with the energy crises.

Both Govs. Cecil D. Andrus and John V. Evans implored the legislators to properly fund this office, correctly predicting it would assume increasing importance for the need to cope with the energy shortages.

The Legislature turned a deaf ear to Andrus' plea to create an Office of Energy during the 1973 oil embargo. As a result he created the office by executive order and diverted federal funds for its operation.

Republican legislative leaders bitterly criticized him but subsequent events showed he was right. Since then Evans had been forced on almost bended knees to plead for proper funding.

The Office of Energy presently under Kirk Hall is attempting to meet the growing demands on a skimpy staff.

Wayne Hall, director of the energy resource program, said the office did get \$150,000 state money this year to augment about \$1,000,000 federal funds.

The Joint Finance Appropriation Committee, however, at the last session, haughtily turned down the office request for \$25,000 more to employ a staff member to handle the gas and oil allocation. As a result, Chris Smith, who was engaged in radioactive waste management and other activities, was shifted to supervise the gasoline and oil allocation. The office is functioning on an inadequate budget even though its duties are assuming more and more importance.

Two years ago, the Legislature even pared from \$150,000 to \$126,000 in state funding, slicing the use of one staff member.

This year, the Legislature also cut \$2,000 in salary raises for the overworked staff, noted Hall.

Perhaps the most ludicrous defense was advanced by Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt, who said Saturday, no, it was not the Republican Legislature fault for the present energy woes, it was Andrus and Evans, along with the Idaho Public Utilities.

Batt, who should know better, then stretches his imagination by saying the Republicans had created a change in attitude of the IPUC to allow timely additional power generation and have questioned a newly appointed PUC commissioner on his attitude toward power output. How this can be closely related to the energy office funding situation is puzzling.

He then said "it has been Governor Andrus and Governor Evans, not the majority party in the Legislature, who through the PUC policies, have thwarted additional electrical generation sites within the state."

Not so, says Conley Ward, the new IPUC chairman.

He said the IPUC rejected the Pioneer generating site south of Boise, primarily because advisory votes in three Boise Valley counties rejected the Pioneer project. He also pointed out that 1979 was the year it was alleged there would not be enough electrical power in Idaho but such is not the case.

Ward then observed the IPUC has encouraged nuclear power, has approved Idaho Power Co.'s application for dam sites at Dike and Wiley on the Snake River, two other dams on the Payette River and its plans to participate in a plant construction near Winnemucca, Nev.

Neither Utah Power and Light Co. or Washington Water Power Co. have applied for increased power production facilities in the state, he added.

Actually the law is still on the books for the INEC but there has been no desire for funding after the partisan Republican Senate refused to appropriate \$186,000 for its operation in a political hassle.

The executive order creating the Office of Energy gives it a different direction than enjoyed by the INEC which was primarily concerned with development of nuclear power.

With the energy crunch, this

might be a propitious time to consider reopening the INEC, or at least give the energy office more direction for use of commercial nuclear energy in Idaho.

The Office of Energy actually is a successor of the old Idaho Nuclear Energy Commission which functioned in Idaho Falls for nine years until it went out of existence June 30, 1976, because of lack of funding.



Senate GOP leaders

BOISE — The Idaho Senate Republican leaders, James E. Risch, Boise, majority leader, left, and President Pro Tem Reed W. Budge, Soda Springs, right, took a prominent role the last session in depriving the Idaho Office of Energy of adequate funding to cope with the current energy crunch.