

Statehouse sidelights . . .

Idaho at crossroads on water development

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The Idaho Water Resource Board, the key agency in deciding the future water policies, expressed deep concern in its sessions here last week for getting enough money to finance essential water development projects.

They had an excellent opportunity to probe the views of two veteran legislators who will have powerful voices in water funding — Rep. Vard Chatburn, R-Albion, influential chairman of the House Natural Resources and Conservation Committee and dean of the House, and Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, chairman of the Senate Natural Resources and Environment Committee. Also on the Legislative Interim Committee on Water problems and on hand were Reps. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, and Roger Guernsey, D-Boise.

The discussions between these two groups indicate that while the Idaho Water Resources Board is performing spectacularly in handling water affairs, the state is far behind in providing essential funding for water development.

Ray W. Rigby, Rexburg, a well known water attorney who served as president of the U.S. Interstate Council on Water Problems and others, recounted how most other Western States have allocated millions of dollars for water projects. California and Texas, for example, provide many millions through general obligation bonds.

Yet, in Idaho, the water board has a measly \$500,000 in its water fund. The Idaho Legislature did manage to grab \$1 million from the surplus last year to help in water development.

C. Stephen Allred, Boise, the astute director of the Department of Water Sources, tossed out nine ways in which the water board can get some funding.

After prolonged discussions, the board members and the legislators finally agreed on three salient ways for possible funding. They are a probable 1 percent energy tax on electrical use, which could furnish \$12 million or more; transfer of the kilowatt tax fund from the general to a water trust fund, which would add a million or more, and a space of the state surplus, the amount of which could be sizeable. The surplus in recent past years has ranged from \$10 million to \$20 million but the 1 percent tax limitation would likely dampen on this for the immediate future.

Herman McDevitt, Pocatello attorney, a board member, gloomily predicted that the days when the federal government would open its pursestrings for reclamation projects are over.

Discussions indicate that other states have the same views and are depending on their own resources to build hydroelectric dams and other water projects, rather than looking to the government.

Idaho, with its meager resources and a rather indifferent Legislature, has hardly enough money of its own to throw a log across the stream, much less sponsor a major project.

What is mystifying is why general obligation bonds which provide millions of dollars in other states, weren't favored.

In Idaho, the Legislature even approved nearly doubling the size of Palisades Dam power under a revenue bond program, by which the power consumers would pay for the improvements. Already this project is receiving favorable reception in Congress.

If Chatburn, Williams, Tibbitts, Guernsey and others are really sincere in their desire to help develop Idaho's water,

they could have an important voice in writing such legislation.

Last year, the Legislature showed less than enthusiastic support, in view of the depressing 1 percent tax limitation syndrome.

Perhaps in 1980, some significant progressive steps can be taken. All agree something much be done and the water resource board and Allred would be only too glad to lead the way.

Idaho also is jealously guarding its water, but it had better make use, or lose.

Board memers said they are

fully aware that all of the Snake River water flowing outside the state into Washington State is being carefully monitored. After the second 10-year moratorium expires in eight more years, Idaho had better be in a position to prove it is using all of its water, or else face the danger of transport to other states or basins.

With this in mind, the board passed a strongly worded resolution to oppose any provision which would give the federal government a "fast track" to override state water laws. "Fast track" means legislation for a quick federal takeover.