

# North Idaho Democrats missed INEL briefing

Nov. 22, 1979

By BEN J. PLASTINO  
Post-Register political editor

North Idaho Democrats' the Joint Finance Appropriation Committee sessions here last Sept. 26-28 on the grounds it was largely a pleasure trip might have found themselves better informed to cope with the inflated issues swirling about the alleged aquifer contamination.

It was pointed out earlier these Democrats did neither themselves nor their party any favors when two or three of the more partisan ones announced they would not attend the JFAC sessions in East Idaho.

The Associated Press accounts at that time said they did not think the sessions were justified because the committee only planned to have two or three hours of meetings and most of the three days would be spent in tours, including what they thought was an unnecessary one of the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory.

Leading the attack were Sens. Art Manley, Coeur d'Alene; and Mike Mitchell, Lewiston, and Reps. Marion Davidson, Bonners Ferry, and Joe Wagner, Lewiston.

They are four of only seven Democrats on the 20-member committee. Of the other three, two from East Idaho, Sens. Richard A. Egbert, Teton, who attended all of the sessions and helped in the arrangement; and Chick Bilyeu, Pocatello, attended the first day, while Rep. Emery E. Hedlund, St. Maries, was vacationing in his native Sweden.

Three Republican members also failed to attend, but the committee had a quorum of 11, so it was able to officially transact business at its session.

The news dispatches said the North Idaho Democrats charged the INEL tour had nothing to do with joint committee business.

The committee co-chairman, Rep. Doyle C. Miner, R-St. Anthony, pointed out the committee visited private timber and mining interests and the Lewiston waterway when in North Idaho and these also were not exactly business for state appropriation.



Post-Register photo

## Lewiston legislator

BOISE — State Sen. Mike Mitchell, D-Lewiston, led the movement for North Idaho Democrats boycott of a session of the Legislative Joint Finance Appropriation Committee in East Idaho Sept. 26-28, on grounds it was economically unjustified.

The INEL work staff of some 9,200 is the second largest work force in the state, aside from state government with 11,000, and it would indicate their activities likely have a considerable economic impact on state government.

\*\*\*

The charges of contamination of the huge aquifer located below the INEL, by tritium and other waste likely will concern the Legislature. Some of the news stories are badly exaggerated and distorted, such as that carried in the Lewiston Morning Tribune, last week, which appeared three years after such stories were carried by The Post-Register.

This would indicate the North Idaho Democrats should have viewed the radioactive waste management programs at the INEL for their own information.

Rep. Jim Golder, R-Boise, has announced he is contemplating legislation to stop shipment of radioactive waste into Idaho.

Rep. Wendell Miller, D-Idaho Falls, the only legislator employed at the INEL, has planned a counter-measure in the form of a memorial affirming Idaho will accept such wastes as long as they are properly handled.

Golder did tour the site Monday to better inform himself.

\*\*\*

Mitchell points out with some justification that the INEL operation has no direct bearing with the JFAC budgeting. Yet it benefits them to know something about INEL which is likely one of the leading

economic factors in Idaho and affects the state's financial pictures. It relates as much as the North Idaho lumber and mining industry.

Mitchell said the boycott was not entirely for the reasons disseminated in the press — that it was economically unjustified.

He said John Andreason, the Legislative Fiscal Office director, had changed meeting dates of the committee without consulting beforehand any of the minority party members. Many were miffed at this lack of consideration and some had

already made prior commitments, he added.

Mitchell pointed out he couldn't attend anyway because he had suffered painful leg and facial injuries in a bad fall.

Mitchell expressed pleasure the JFAC in its session here granted a delay in preparing a 100 percent budget, or one similar to the current year, until a day after the Legislative Revenue Projection Committee releases its anticipated revenue figures. Mitchell said he opposed Andreason's request on this matter.