

The 1980 Idaho Legislature . . .

State workers likely won't get desired hike

(Editor's note: This is the 12th in a series of 15 articles giving the views of East Idaho legislators on the issues shaping up for the coming session).

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State employees' desire for a 13 percent salary hike, plus other benefits, likely will not be realized, but they may get some increase.

That appears the views of the majority of the East Idaho legislators who answered a questionnaire on this proposal, which in recent years has delayed adjournment of the Legislature.

Nearly all of the lawmakers expressed the view they didn't believe there was enough revenue available to grant the 13 percent increase formally requested by the Idaho Public Employees Association, plus fringe benefits, such as dental insurance.

Both of the legislative leaders, Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Springs, and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, were less than enthusiastic.

Cut force

Olmstead said it could only come about by a reduction in the state force and Budge said he would have difficulty going along with this, as the slowdown in the economy would preclude such a hike.

Gov. John V. Evans, in his budget message, has asked for an 8.5 percent increase.

Rep. Doyle C. Miner, R-St. Anthony, co-chairman of the Joint Finance Appropriations Committee, which will have the major voice in such a financial matter, said the tax structure indicates only a 9-10 percent increase and that would be the

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highest possible. He opposes dental insurance benefits.

Rep. Ray E. Infanger, R-Salmon, another member of the JFAC, likely expressed the views of most, commenting, "When we have a more accurate figure on what our state revenue for this year will be, then we will know what we can do on raises or benefits."

The dean of the Legislature and ranking minority member of the JFAC, Sen. Richard A. Egbert, D-Tetonia, said he would need to study such a raise in light of the revenue available.

Rep. C. Wendell Miller, D-Idaho Falls, commented, "I believe that, insofar as possible, the salaries should be kept in line with inflation. It may not be possible to fund at that level. Dental insurance is increasingly becoming a standard for insurance coverage and should be provided if possible."

Questions request

Sen. Vearl C. Crystal, R-Rigby, said he questions the 13 percent, but it should be negotiated. He adds, "Dental insurance is out."

Rep. Linden B. Bateman, R-Idaho Falls, said he does not believe there will be enough money in the general fund to provide the increase and still meet other needs in state government and education.

Sen. Israel Merrill, R-Idaho Falls, said, "The (state) employees) need an increase. I doubt insurance will fly and it is a tremendous cost. Another veteran

Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, said she thought the 13 percent is too high, and feared the dental program might cost too much.

"I would need to see the revenue projection figures before I would make up my mind," she said, a sentiment most legislators agreed with.

Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, a former veteran member of the JFAC, said there is a need to tighten the financial belt, adding he didn't feel the 13 percent is possible. He did say dental insurance might be implemented, if feasible.

Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, stated his strong opposition. "Does the taxpayer receive this kind of consideration?"

Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, said, "State employees are entitled to some increase in salaries. However, I don't think there will be sufficient state revenue for 13 percent."