

The school scene . . .

# School levy election to test voters' mood

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Next Tuesday's Idaho Falls School District 7.92 mill override election incurs some interest in determining the mood of school patrons to approve an override following passage of the 1 percent tax limitation initiative last fall.

Dr. James Parsley, the energetic school district superintendent, feels confident the levy will pass by a substantial majority, and a sampling would indicate he is right. The levy, fortunately, takes only a majority vote.

This writer feels there should be a 65-70 percent majority unless there is apathy at the polls or an unforeseen last minute development.

The Idaho Falls levy is only one of five already scheduled in East Idaho, augmenting those in Bonneville 93, Madison at Rexburg, Snake River west of Blackfoot, and Firth. There could be others.

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Contrary to charges that only frills would be eliminated, most school districts are calling these override levies to maintain the minimum requirements, or else face possible loss of accreditation.

In District 91, for example, some of the points that must be considered are that even with the override, total property taxes will be lower for the patrons; the district budget will be cut \$250,000 because of declining enrollment; 11 teacher positions will be cut by attrition. If the override fails, 56 teachers would be terminated and the district likely would lose full accreditation in case of defeat. The new levy funds would help make up state funds lost as result of declining enrollment.

Parsley said the so-called frills have long since been slashed, such as elimination of field trips outside the region to save \$8,000; planned elimination of minor sports, such as golf, tennis and baseball, but maintaining football and basketball, which are self supporting; and imposing a moratorium on custodial help, even though the new West Side School will be added next year.

On the drawing board, of course, is closure of the New Sweden elementary school next year, and the phaseout, in two years, of O. E. Bell Junior High School.

Parsley said one of the announcements that hurt was from School Dept. Jerry Evans during the Legislature last March, indicating that Idaho Falls Schools would receive \$564,000 in additional funding as result of increased public school appropriation.

Not so, said Parsley. That was accurate for January, but in these four months, 156 students left school as dropouts or by moving, and the anticipated increased funding has dropped \$420,000, from loss of average daily attendance, to \$143,000.

Other surges in expenditures are reshuffling of the administrative staff so that some school principals will do some halftime teaching, some openings will not be filled, and one of the biggest economy moves, omitting new textbook adoptions next year.

**Idaho Falls voters approved the 4.2 mill levy last year by a whopping 84 percent, the highest percentage of any in the state.** This was a sharp reversal from 1975, when they turned down a \$500,000 levy, resulting in loss of 30 staff positions. Much of this defeat, however, swirled around dissatisfaction with administration, and the rancor left from a teacher strike, rather than the levy itself.

The defeat placed the school district on a warned accreditation status and forced it to scrimp for two years to overcome the lost revenue.

There is another contrast this year in the school district.

**This year, patrons will vote for three trustees. The terms of Chairman Ken Carroll, Harold Christensen and Clyde Toole expire.**

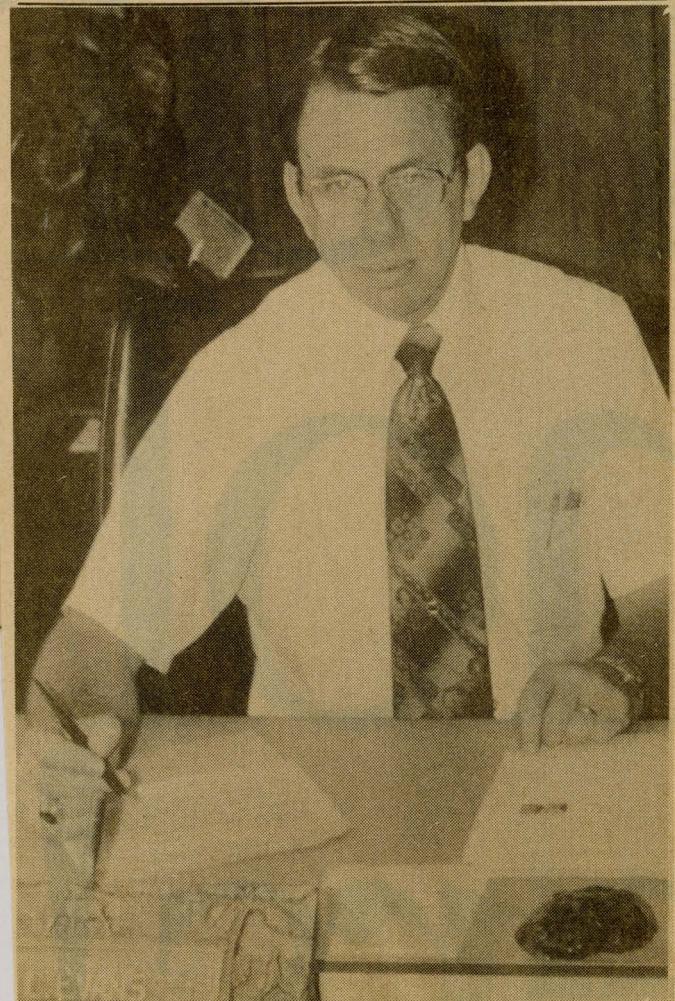
Carroll and Christensen, who have served three three-year terms, said they did not plan to seek re-election. Toole has served only a few months to fill a vacancy created by resignation of Rex Meikle, who moved to a new zone. Toole has filed to run for the remaining year term.

**The interest is extremely low and only Richard Helmer has filed to replace Christensen in**

**Zone 2, the west side. The filing deadline is Friday night.**

It doesn't take much imagination to realize that with the tight budgets, long hours and inherent financial troubles, many public spirited citizens are reluctant to serve on school boards. It could become a serious condition not only in Idaho Falls and East Idaho but throughout the state.

As a contrast there were hot races for two zones last year. Michelle Brown nosed out Delmer J. Simpson by five votes in Zone 5, in one of the closest races on record, in a heavy turnout, but Ray Hart spread-eagled a field of four in Zone 3.



Post-Register photo

## Idaho school boss

**BOISE— Jerry Evans, superintendent of public instruction in Idaho, at his desk in the Len B. Jordan state office building, sees tight budgets for Idaho's 115 school districts.**