

Cunningham's Comment:

Fight to Cut Rural Control Of Legislature Expected

By Ross Cunningham
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A MOVE can be expected soon to break the grip rural counties of Washington hold on the state's lawmaking processes.

The migration of new population into the urban areas of the state in the past few years has been so great that the Legislature no longer even approached representation on a population basis.

Advocates of reapportionment compare two legislative districts: No. 31, which runs from Puget Sound to beyond Lake Washington, taking in part of Seattle, and casts about 30,000 votes in an election. No. 10, which embraces Columbia, Garfield and Asotin Counties in Southeastern Washington, and casts about 6,000 votes.

This means that 6,000 voters have the same representation when it comes to making our laws as 30,000. These districts are extremes, but show how a comparatively few persons in rural areas can outvote urban districts in the Legislature.

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UNFORTUNATELY, as the rural districts hold this advantage, they can-and-do-use it to prevent a reapportionment to correct the inequality. Bills introduced in the Legislature to correct the situation invariably die in committees dominated by the rural areas.

The disparity in representation becomes extremely important in the allocation of highway funds and such things as

oleomargarine tax repeal, generally favored by urban legislators but opposed by their counterparts from the agricultural districts.

In killing the reapportionment measures, the legislators ignore a constitutional provision intended to require reapportionment every five years.

In fact, there has been only one reapportionment since 1901. That was in 1931 when the voters took the prerogative from the legislators and reapportioned the state by initiative.

Washington's population in 1930, on which the present legislative apportionment is based, was 1,563,396; in 1940 the federal census set the state's population at 1,736,191—and since then it is estimated to have increased 43 percent, mostly in urban areas.

So it is obvious that the present distribution of lawmakers is not representative.

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PROPOSERS of reapportionment are making a quiet survey of the lawmakers elected this year to see if there is any chance of attaining their objective in the 1949 Legislature. A negative decision is likely.

The probabilities are that they will resort to the course taken in 1931, by initiative. They do not feel it would be too difficult to obtain the necessary number of signatures to place the measure on the ballot because of the apparent unfairness of the present apportionment.