The election eye . . .

Church-Symms Senate battle starting early

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The prospective senatorial battle between Democrat Sen. Frank Church and Republican Rep. Steve Symms already seems to be getting under way with exchange of barbs between the two last week.

It now appears that Symms is moving so far into the fracas that it may be difficult for him to withdraw as the pressure mounts for his entry. He is keeping the door ajar, but it is slowly closing.

Another sign he is heading for a senatorial race is the fact he is sending news releases to The Post-Register for the first time.

Symms, in a press interview at Boise last week, substantially said what he had told this writer a week earlier, even to naming the same possible Republican opponents for the senatorial nomination.

In looking over the field, it would appear, however, that only Symms has the best chance to oust the well entrenched and powerful Church.

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Symms appeared to have a strong political point last week when he criticized Church for allowing the president's gas rationing bill to pass the Senate Energy Committee, switching his vote from no to aye to do so.

Church explained earlier that he believed the gas rationing plan would have been favorable to Idaho. It later developed Idaho would only get 89 percent of the national average allocation, even though it is a state with comparatively sparse population, long miles to travel and in need of fuel for extensive farming operations.

Church said he voted to place the bill on the Senate floor for full debate but voted against it. It was Symms' justifiable contention and measure should never have passed committee.

As it developed the measure passed the Senate on a final ballot comfortably 58-39 but was overwhelmingly defeated in the House, 246-159.

Post-Register photo

Church expounds

U.S. Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, is doing what he does best — public speaking. He is considered as one of the most outstanding orators in the nation. Here he addresses an Idaho Falls gathering.

The House rejection likely deprived Symms of a strong political point, and, in fact, it now might work to Church's favor. That's because if there is no standby gas rationing plan and an acute emergency develops there could be economic chaos. However, the president and Congress possibly could hurriedly whip up some bill if this becomes necessary.

Now Carter has tossed the gauntlet to Congress to pass its own bill. Thus, if past records are a criterion, this could take a long time, maybe never, if you would believe.

Symms, along with Idaho Republican Chairman Dennis M. Olsen, sought to emphasize the point if gas rationing goes into effect in the near future that Idahoans could blame Church.

Church retorts, "The fact is that it is time for the politicians to level with the people about the need to have a standby gasoline rationing plan in place."

And, so, the battle has been joined.

This gives an indication of things to come because every vote Church casts will be closely watched. It would appear he never will be caught in the squeeze (pardon the pun) on gasoline rationing again. He will likely try to see that Idaho's quota will be equitable.

Yet, it appears difficult to devise a plan that is equitable to all states. In the House, most of the representatives from the populous states of California and New York voted against the bill because they did not think their states were fairly treated.

Maybe in the end the president's plan will be adopted but with amendments that will overcome objections. Why not place all states at 100 percent, instead of some above and some below, or is that too fair and equitable?