

The election eye . .

Church rated champ by many senior citizens

BY BEN J. PLASTINO

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One of the fallacies that must be exposed early in the campaign is the contention by Republican leaders that members of their Idaho congressional delegation, Sens. James A. McClure and Reps. George Hansen and Steve Symms have done well for senior citizens.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Their voting record shows them to be among the those with the worst voting record for legislation to help the elderly seeking to cope with living costs.

The situation especially affects Symms, who is locked in a titanic senatorial battle with Democrat Sen. Frank Church. Hansen appears to have a fairly easy time against Democrat Diane Bilyeu, Pocatello realtor, while McClure isn't running.

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There is little question Church is the champion of senior citizens on a national scale on the basis of his voting record and his sponsoring of countless pieces of legislation in their behalf. Any partisan effort to discredit him on this point is not based on facts.

The Alliance of Senior Citizens is an excellent case in point. It is dedicated to the goal of cutting government spending and favors right wing politicians. The first reduction in government spending usually comes in the area of human services, particularly for senior citizens. For all practical purposes, this organization is anti-senior citizen, which is vividly reflected in its high rankings of those who consistently vote against the interests of the elderly. These rankings include the three Idaho Republicans now serving in Congress.

Fran Wheelock, president of the Boise network of the Gray Panthers, a senior citizen organization, recently noted "the National Alliance of Senior Citizens is recognized as a well-financed front for the right wing."

It was organized by a 29-year-old man, Curt Clinkscale, in 1976. Its financing comes from the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons and other far right groups, she said. The name, she observed, "obviously was chosen to confuse the elderly with the long established National Council of Senior Citizens," viewed as the bonafide organization representing the nation's elderly.

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Clinkscale also is a member of the board of the National Conservative Political Action Committee, which is financing the Anybody but Church and other anti-Church groups.

This so-called National Alliance of Senior Citizens gave Symms and Hansen 100 percent ranking, McClure 89 percent and Church only 20 percent.

Compare this with the bonafide National Council of Senior Citizens which rates Church at near 100 percent and McClure, Hansen and Symms at the bottom near zero. The latest rankings placed Church at 80 percent and Symms a flat zip. Hansen also received a goose-egg and McClure was listed at 10.

The cumulative voting record since the NCSC began its evaluation in 1973 lists Church at 88 percent, McClure 5 percent, Symms 2 percent, and Hansen, zero.

The National Alliance of Senior Citizens has launched distorted attacks on the National Council of Senior Citizens, the American Association of Retired Persons and National Retired Teachers Association which are the recognized organization of those retired persons serving more than 10 million members, said Mrs. Wheelock.

The latest issues of The Trumpeter, organ of the Bonneville County Republican Women, sought to justify the deplorable senior citizen record of McClure, Hansen and Symms and impugn that of Church. This literature was sold at the Idaho Republican Convention at Boise last month for \$1. Its main thrust was that by cutting government spending it would help senior citizens. It neglected to mention that human services, including those for senior citizens, are usually the main ones slashed.

On basis of record, no single senator has had a greater impact on the lives of America's senior citizens than Church. He has either sponsored or supported virtually every piece of legislation on the past decade to benefit the elderly. It would be safe to note that without Church many of the elderly today would be in a far more dire straits than they are now. These are undisputable facts.

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As chairman and ranking member of the Senate Committee on Aging, Church has operated from a position of special significance to senior citizens. He has received every major honor conferred by the nation's leading senior citizens organizations, such as the American Association of Retired Persons, the National Retired Teachers Association and the National Council of Senior Citizens.

Church has sponsored many improvements to Social Security benefits, such as in 1972, when he sponsored a bill to overcome

the Nixon administration's opposition to requiring annual increases in Social Security benefits to reflect surges in the cost of living; in other words, to meeting the rising cost of inflation.

He has sponsored a number of tax relief measures, including a new law in 1978 which ends, for many of those over age 55, the capital gains tax on the sale of a home; expansion of "meals on wheels," home health care and other programs that make it possible for more elderly persons' stay in their homes; increasing the age for mandatory retirement from 65 to 70; expansion of federal volunteer

and employment programs to enable them to use their talents and energy to help their communities and neighbors

- Church also helped write the Medicare-Medicaid anti-fraud and abuse legislation to fight corruption and stiffen penalties for those who prey on the elderly after he and his committee unearthed billions of dollars in Medicare and Medicaid fraud.

The main thrust by the Republicans is the painful knowledge that of the 400,000 registered voters in Idaho, about one fourth, or 100,000 are senior citizens. The Church forces expect to reap the vast majority for the election victory.



Politics and picnic

U.S. Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, right, likes what he does best — meeting senior citizens. Here he is shown in talk to a number of the

1,500 who attended the picnic in Idaho Falls Friday night in honor of his 56th birthday.

Post-Register/Don Skitt