

The election eye . . .

Church SALT II shift angers Eastern press

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One of the strangest developments that has taken place in the U.S. senatorial race is the unique position U.S. Sen. Frank Church finds himself on the crucial SALT II treaty and other international issues.

There was a time when Church was tabbed to ramrod the treaty's ratification in the August Senate but all of this has changed. Church was the first to divulge the presence of some 2,000-3,000 Soviet combat troops in Cuba and has now taken the stand this problem must be resolved before SALT II can receive favorable action.

When Church speaks - like the television brokerage ad-people listen, and indeed they do. As the vigorous chairman of the prestigious Senate Foreign Relations Committee, until he extends approval the treaty is destined for a salt-free diet.

Possibly one of the most amusing aftermath is the bitter attack leveled by the Eastern press and columnists against Church. They accuse him of changing his position to please his conservative Idaho constituents and adopting an equivocal policy on a wide spectrum of issues. A column written by NEA columnists Martha Angle and Robert Walters appearing on this page is an excellent example of what is happening.

These eastern pundits bitterly assail him for his opposition to gun control but it was Church who led in this fight a decade ago and even obtained

thousands of Idaho signatures to impress congressmen of what Idahoans thought about this action.

It was Church who was one of the first to oppose the Vietnam War 15 years ago when it was unpopular to do so. This writer remembers strongly supporting him and subsequent developments showed Church was right.

Perhaps one of the most ironic attacks against Church came from the so-called Idaho Committee for Positive Action because he changed his position on the Vietnam War. It's true Church voted for the Bay of Tonkin Resolution which escalated the Vietnam War but it was on the assurance of then President Lyndon B. Johnson that the action was necessary.

Church shifted his position when America's foolish foray was exposed by sending American troops, although he continued to vote for military appropriation, taking the stand that as long as American soldiers were committed they needed the best weapons they could get.

He took considerable abuse until just before the 1974 elections when America's tragic experience unfolded. Johnson cut him as a confidant.

All senators except two voted for that Tonkin resolution which eventually brought Johnson's downfall.

Of all the issues to attack Church, the ICPA selection of the Vietnam War was the worst.

Whatever one can say, Church is his own man and has taken opposition stands to the president on SALT II and other international policies, is even fighting an old personal friend, Secretary of Interior Cecil D. Andrus on the Reclamation

Reform Act to bring more use of public lands but generally joins with Republican Sen. James A. McClure and other members of the Idaho congressional delegation on legislation to benefit Idaho.

Church is receiving considerable flak because his critics say he has changed his position on SALT II, just as he did on Vietnam. When conditions change it's only good sense to change with them.

Church hasn't closed his mind to the treaty but he has left it clear the Soviets had better pull back from power plays in the Caribbean. The 3,000 combat Soviet troops in Cuba are no threat but their implications as a forerunner of what Russia contemplates is.

The radical right, as can be expected, tacks insidious motives on Church views. However, even U.S. Rep. George V. Hansen commended Church for his expose of the Cuban situation.

Whatever the Eastern press and interests say against Church, carry little significance. He doesn't represent them; he represents Idaho and the Idahoans are the ones who cast the votes in the U.S. Senate race.

From the almost half million dollars Church already has amassed in his war chest it's apparent he has powerful financial friends in the East as most of this money came from outside of Idaho.

Church's potential challenger, Republican U.S. Rep. Steve Symms, of the First District, is banking on a strong conservative tide to sweep him into office. It remains to be seen in the months ahead if he succeeds or if Church has blunted the tide again the breakers.