

The senatorial scene . . .

Church, McClure trade blows for first time

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The exchange between the two Idaho senators, Democrat Frank Church and Republican James A. McClure, was not so important on the merits of foreign policy issues in which they disagreed but mostly because they conducted a newspaper argument with each other.

It is the first time the two senators have exchanged verbal criticisms against each other directly, although they have differed on a wide range of domestic and foreign issues.

The argument was prompted a couple of weeks ago at Lewiston when Church in a press interview labeled Republican U.S. Rep. Steve Symms and McClure as "water boys" for the radical Arab states.

It is understandable for Church to blast at Symms, with whom he has constantly disagreed on a wide front, along with Idaho's other far right Republican congressman, George Hansen, but to draw McClure in the controversy is astonishing.

The two have political differences but they have worked closely together on many proposals that vitally affected Idaho, such as in the field of natural resources, land-use, forest and range management wilderness areas, reclamation, agricultural, and many others.

Even in political campaigns, Church and McClure have avoided vigorous campaigning for opponents. Church did little to help Democrat Dwight Jensen in 1978 and Bud Davis in 1972 against McClure. Similarly, McClure didn't lend any heavy hand for Republican Bob Smith in 1974 or Hansen in 1968 against Church.

In any foreign policy argument, Church holds the upper hand because he is the new chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. It must be observed the differences between the two on such matters likely wouldn't have much direct impact on Idaho's interests anyway.

Many deplore the two directly criticized each other for the first time, but others believe such a debate may help in greatly exposing the issues.

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Church, of course, is one of the best known and highly respected senators in the nation, while McClure is also attaining eminence as a leader of the conservatives.

Church was a serious presidential candidate in 1976 and even beat President Carter in a number of states where he earnestly campaigned, but then he ran out of money.

McClure stands high in Republican circles and was a vice presidential contender in the 1976 Republican convention.

Church, with justification, is accused of heavily favoring Israel in the Middle East as a means of currying favor with Eastern interests.

McClure is charged as strongly leaning for the Arab nations, taking several trips there, and at least on one occasion, at the expense of the Arabs.

If a Middle East peace settlement is achieved, as appears likely, then the differences between the two should largely evaporate.

This writer has always felt that McClure's efforts in the Middle East in behalf of the Arabs make more sense. Those nations are the ones which can supply the oil, especially Saudi Arabia which has shown moderation against the rest of the OPEC nations for exorbitant oil price increases. McClure pointed this out in a news release only Wednesday. Yet, prices still go up.

Church's efforts for Israel strike a sympathetic note for a nation which has struggled for recognition following the Nazi oppression during World War II. However, in the way of monetary help, Israel offers nothing, and in fact is largely dependent on the United States and other friendly Western nations to even survive.

William Safire of the New York Times in a column last Feb. 15 touched on this very issue. He wrote Symms sought to have an off-the-record luncheon for members of the House Agriculture Committee of which he is a member, with the radical Libyan dictator, Muammar el-Qaddafi. The dictator also lunched with McClure later.

Safire noted that Church is Qaddafi's real target, but only last Friday, Church reiterated his opposition to sale of military transport and other equipment to Libya on grounds it encourages world terrorism.

Safire noted he has often flayed Church but adds, "When a dictator (Quaddafi) uses his money to get business to exert influence on the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee to get the U.S. government to cave in to arms demands — that is a blatant attempt to subvert Americans institutions, and conservatives from Washington to Boise should close ranks to resist."