

The election eye . . .

Church-Symms contest tactics take ugly turn

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The sizzling senatorial race between Democrat Sen. Frank Church and Republican Steve Symms has taken an ugly turn after having been waged on a rather creditable basis most of the summer.

The injection of the womanizing and beer drinking charges against Symms from various unsubstantiated sources can be viewed with repugnancy by voters who want to see the campaign waged on its merits.

Hopefully, this type of campaigning will be discarded and the outcome settled on the paramount issues of inflation, interest rates, wilderness, natural resources, land use, defense, foreign policies, federal spending, jobs and others that primarily concern the voters.

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Whether State Republican Chairman Dennis M. Olsen took a wise move in calling a press conference is open to question. He contends, with some justification, that the whispering campaign which now has bloomed full scale must be answered. Olsen said he felt the entire issue should be brought out into the open, and then, hopefully forgotten.

He acknowledged it was a distasteful task he had to do but he felt it was necessary to clear the air.

Olsen's press conference last week was intended to show that some Idaho AFL-CIO people were behind the movement. Olsen displayed some material purported to have come from the union files and smearing Symms on alleged womanizing allegations. The Olsen presentation, however, appeared rather nebulous in attempting to solidly connect the union with the Symms smear.

However, after thinking it over immediately after the conference, Olsen called Robert Kinghorn, president of the Idaho AFL-CIO, and was told by

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Kinghorn that he would investigate the issue and do everything he could to stop these rumors that might be coming through the union.

In turn, Olsen commended Kinghorn but made it clear that Kinghorn did not concede the union was responsible for any of the rumors.

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If past political elections are any criterion, such types of emotional rumors will escalate, rather than diminish. Olsen took the commendable stand of attempting to forever putting them to rest. It's time for perpetrators of such insidious scandal mongerings to bring forth proof, if any, or desist.

Olsen called on Church, his campaign officials, labor union supporters and the news media to disavow and condemn such unfair campaign practices.

Olsen said he was not prepared to say Church is personally involved but did assert that Church is in a position to bring a halt to this sort of thing.

Olsen unfairly accused Church of saying Symms' love life is his own business, inferring that Symms had one. Olsen described this as "subtle continuation" of the smear tactics.

The remark, however, was that of Kinghorn, not of Church.

Church's official comments sent to newspapers stated: "The private life of Symms is not a legitimate issue in this campaign. As far as I'm concerned this subject is strictly out-of bounds. I have never referred to the personal life of my opponent in any campaign, past or present, and never will. I disavow such tac-

tics. They demean the political process, and deserved to be dismissed with score."

That's about as strong a statement as can be issued and certainly should satisfy Olsen.

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The issue came to public attention by letters sent to East Idaho papers, including The Post-Register. The Olsen press conference now places the issue clearly in the public sector. Fortunately it comes early in the campaign. If there is any proof to this effect it should be brought forth, something that may be difficult to do.

This type of campaigning doesn't do either candidate any good and the sooner it is forgotten the better for everyone.