

The election eye . . .

Symms exudes confidence

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When U.S. Rep. Steve Symms was in Idaho Falls last weekend to further his efforts for the senatorial contest, he portrayed the picture of confidence, rather than the underdog challenger.

By coincidence, this was greatly bolstered by receipt of the Idaho poll results while he was in The Post-Register for an interview. This poll, taken over the last two weeks, showed a dramatic shift of 21.1 points in his favor, placing him ahead 44.7 percent to Church's 33.1, and 23.2 undecided. This contrasted with the January poll which showed Church at 41.8, Symms at 32.7 and 25.5 undecided.

Although Symms says he is not misled by these poll results, it indicates support is moving in his favor. He expressed surprise the margin was so pronounced in his favor.

At this time, it can't help but give him the feeling that he is ahead. Symms has always believed he was trailing, but was confident this would change as the campaign moved along. Now this appears to have happened, a year before the election.

The Idaho Statesman poll at Boise released Monday based on 385 telephone interviews in all 44 counties showed opposite results. It placed Church ahead of Symms 50.7 to 34, with 15.1 percent undecided.

Confusing isn't it?

It indicates poll taking is more of a game when it's this far ahead of an election and not taken scientifically or professionally.

Both Church and Symms know that polls of these type are

precarious, especially one taken a year ahead of the election and taken of a comparatively small sampling.

Even Howard Schrag, the director who conducted the Idaho Poll, acknowledges that he doesn't put much stock in it.

The poll is far from representative, as Schrag is quick to acknowledge. It randomly surveyed some 200 in the seven largest counties of Ada, Canyon, Bannock, Bonneville, Twin Falls, Kootenai, and Nez Perce, plus three smaller counties, Owyhee, Jefferson and Idaho. It was the same procedure used in the January poll.

That would mean an average of only 20 polled in each county and in only 10 of the 44 counties in Idaho.

Symms now, and Church in the first poll and Statesman poll, are aware of this situation, but nevertheless it does give a psychological boost. It is especially encouraging to Symms, who can't help but feel that he has a good chance of winning.

In the final analysis the hard core supporters of Church and Symms aren't going to be

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swayed by polls or many other factors.

In rough figures, each may have 30-40 percent of the voters in their camp. That means the 20-30 percent who have few political ties, and, unfortunately are less politically informed, will decide the election.

This is bolstered by polls which show the crucial 23-25 percent undecided, plus the swing vote of 11 percent.

Church's winning margin has only been between 5 and 10 percent because as a Democrat and a moderate or liberal — whatever label one chooses to name — he has run against the Idaho Republican conservative current.

But Church's greatest margin of victory was against Symms' House colleague, Rep. George

Hansen, who he handily beat by 60 percent in 1968.

Most believe the issue is political and philosophical differences — conservative, which strongly favors Symms and moderate-liberal for Church.

But there are many other key factors.

Many Idahoans resent a congressman deserting his post for self-aggrandizement to seek the Senate as was the case for Hansen and now Symms.

Another factor is the large segment of the elderly who all vote and generally back Church's efforts in their behalf.

Symms, an extremely personable lawmaker, shoots straight from the hip, follows a consistent policy and one knows where he stands.

Church is accused with some merits of inconsistency.

Thus are the issues of battle forming.