

The national scene . . .

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Symms now is leaning for senatorial contest

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After several weeks of vacillating, it now appears that First District Republican Rep. Steve Symms will challenge Democrat Sen. Frank Church in 1980.

Up to last week, Symms appeared to be far from convinced of making the race, but he said his visit over the state during the Easter Congress recess influenced him to strongly lean for tackling the senatorial contest.

Talking about his latest two weeks tour of the state, he said "I'm getting lots of encouragement to make the race, but as yet there is nothing definite. We're still looking. Everything has been encouraging, and there are no discouraging notes. I have a gut feeling I can win."

Symms said he had received support from a wide base, not only the conservatives but veteran organizations and other groups.

Symms pointed out when he first ran for Congress in 1972 if he had polled the so-called Republican leaders they would have advised him not to run. As it turned out he won the First District congressional Republican nomination handily over the heavy favorite, former Attorney General Wayne Kidwell, and then went on to win the general election.

Symms referred to a recent poll in which the majority of Idaho Republican leaders were reluctant to advise him to take the big chance against Church, although admitting he is the strongest Republican candidate.

Another factor the Republican leaders worry about is that if Symms vacates his present position to run for the Senate, the First District seat will be up for grabs. Fearfully, they visualize the strong possibility of losing this seat against a number of formidable Democratic contenders, as well as the Senate race. On the other hand, the party also could win both of them.

This writer also feels that Symms is by far the most formidable Republican opponent Church could face. The other possible Republican opponents, such as Sen. Dean Van Engelen, Burley furniture store owner; C. L. "Butch" Otter, Boise; James Jones, Twin Falls attorney-rancher who opposed Rep. George V. Hansen in the 1978 primary; Hansen himself, Kidwell and a host of others likely wouldn't have much chance.

The latest mentioned is Lt. Gov. Phil Batt, who said he is flattered to be considered, but that he certainly is not interested at this time. There are some groups working in his favor if Symms doesn't run, however.

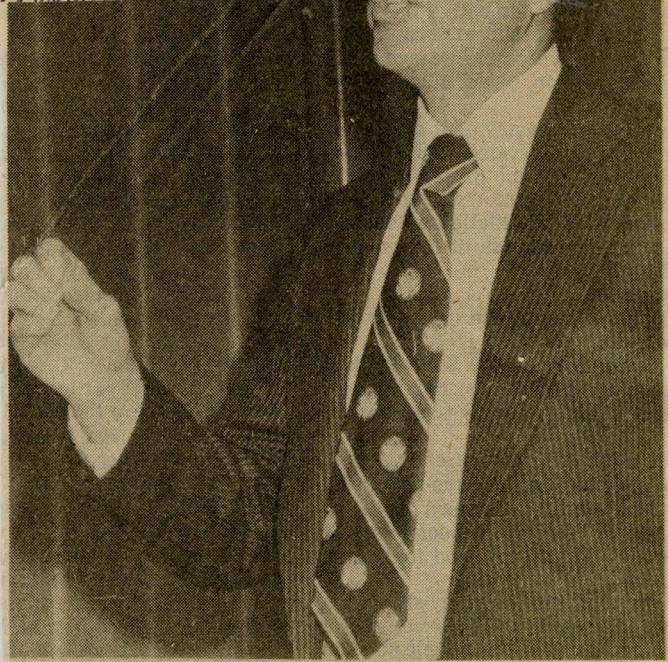
Two others mentioned who can hardly be considered formidable are Theron Nelson, Jerome potato packer; and Bernie Fisher, Boise, Vietnam War Medal of Honor winner.

If Symms were to take the senatorial plunge it would create a wide open race for the First District. Otter, State Sen. Larry Craig, R-Midvale, and Kidwell, among the Republicans; and former State School Supt. Roy Truby, who opposed Symms in 1978; and State Sen. Mike Mitchell, Lewiston, among the Democrats, could be among the leading contenders, but there are many others.

Symms correctly stated that the issues between him and Church would be clearcut. The two come out diametrically opposed, philosophically. Church rates high with the senior citizens and liberal to moderate groups, while Symms is near the bottom there. With the conservative factions, Symms is at the top and Church is at the lowest rung. It would give Idahoans definite choices. Their voting patterns also are in sharp contrast.

Symms worries that despite his high profile among the nation's conservatives, there is a question whether he can raise enough money to match Church. He concedes Church will attract tremendous contributions from the wealthy eastern establishment, while Symms will need to rely on some well-heeled conservative

James Maulana



Post-Register/Don Skitt

Senatorial seeker

REPUBLICAN REP. Steve Symms, of Idaho's First District, appears to be leaning to oppose Democrat Sen. Frank Church for the 1980 senatorial elections. He is seen speaking in Idaho Falls at a recent convention.

factions. The contributions they would raise in Idaho would be small by comparison.

Symms agrees with this writer's predictions of each spending close to \$1 million may not be far off. It would shape up as one of the most interesting and costliest races in the nation, despite Idaho's comparatively small population. In the first three months, reports showed Symms collected \$12,200 and Church \$72,000, only drops in the bucket.

Each would have hundreds of dedicated boosters working for them, and without doubt it would be one of the bitterest, most hard-fought election contests ever waged in Idaho.

Symms indicates that if he decides to seek re-election, he would announce by late summer or early fall. Otherwise he may not announce his senatorial aspirations until late fall or early winter. These should give voters the best clue. If Symms has not announced for re-election, say by Oct. 1, then it can be assumed he will go for the Senate.