The election eye . . .

# Symms, Otter appear to jockey for contests

By BEN J. PLASTINO
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C. L. "Butch" Otter, the free-swinging unorthodox political campaigner, now appears to have changed his position from the earlier one in seeking the Senate seat held by Democratic Sen. Frank Church.

A couple of months ago, Otter appeared intensely interested in the Senate seat and sought to talk U. S. Rep. Steve Symms, the First District congressman, from taking the plunge.

**However, when in Idaho Falls last week for a Freemen Institute banquet to boost the constitutional seminars, he announced that his choice for the Senate was Symms. Asked to explain his statement, he said he felt that Symms is the strongest logical choice to oppose Church while he, Otter, would then try for the First District congressional seat.**

Otter is right, of course, but on the other hand Symms has the most to lose, and at the same time it would throw the First District contest wide open, with the Democrats having an even chance of picking up the seat.

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**Symms has shown signs that he is girding for the Senate race but he is keeping the door open.**

Only recently he hired Sen. James A. McClure's campaign manager, Phil Reberger, for some $40,000 a year, presumably as his administrative assistant at the Boise office.

Most interpret this move as the opening one for the Senate campaign because the administrative assistant is usually located in Washington, not Boise, and such a salary is unusually high for a staff member stationed in Idaho.

**Symms told this writer if he does run for the Senate he will announce his intentions by late summer, likely not later than September. Symms said he is perfectly happy in the House, where he now has considerable seniority and his election triumphs indicate after three consecutive terms that he is almost assured of re-election in the future.**

Symms knows full well the risk he is taking in seeking the Senate post because Idahoans have a strong history for re-electing their incumbents except in rare cases.

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**The tacit agreement between Otter and Symms, who are the leaders on the far right, along with Second District Congressman George Hansen, does not sit well with many other Republicans, especially those in the more moderate vein.**

For example, former Attorney General Wayne L. Kidwell has indicated he is not exactly an admirer of the Symms-Otter combination. He feels perhaps justifiably, the two have too narrow a base for Senate election. Kidwell is also looking at the position but may switch to First District congressman if Symms were to seek the Senate post.

The political pendulum in Idaho has now swung well to the right, but within a couple of years it could begin drifting more to the center. This is especially so after possible cutbacks deprive services which many have taken for granted, such as Social Security, health, welfare and education.

**Symms, who packs much charisma, is in the best position to draw the widest support and raise nationwide money for a senatorial campaign. Most agree it could cost Church and his opponent each a million dollars, but in any case, it would be the costliest ever witnessed on the Idaho scene.**

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*The political pulse*

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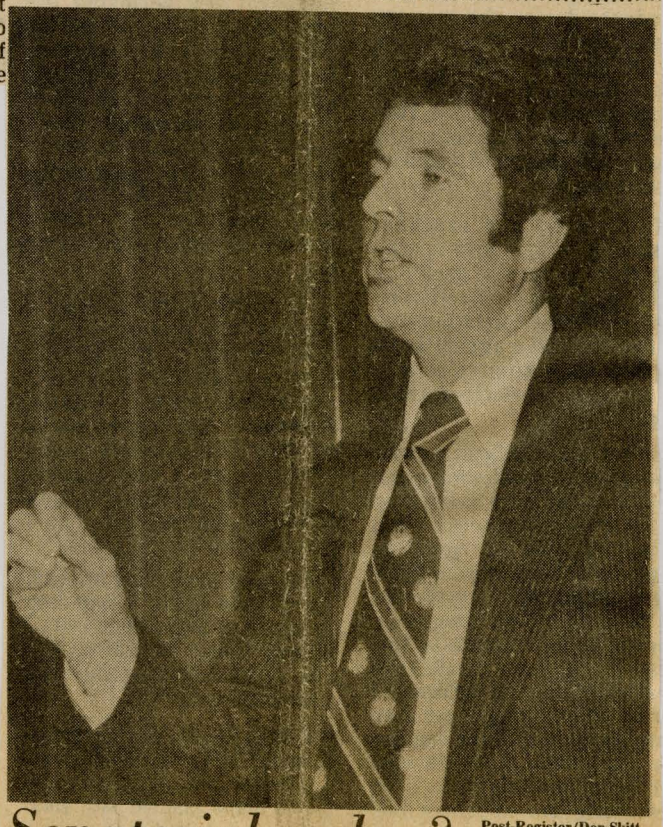

*Senatorial seeker?* Post-Register/Don Skitt

**FIRST DISTRICT Rep. Steve Symms is seen while speaking n Idaho Falls recently at a political forum. He looks ncreasingly like he is grooming to take on U.S. Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, in 1980.**