

Merrill cools Congress race

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By **BEN J. PLASTINO**
Post-Register political editor
BLACKFOOT — State Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, a veteran 12-year legislator, Friday indicated he likely will not seek a congressional seat as has been widely mentioned.

"If I receive wide support, and more important, if I get the money necessary, I would run for Congress," said Merrill, who now manages the Trading Post general store at Fort Hall. "Right now, I'm leaning against it."

Merrill said he tentatively has set Dec. 16 when he will announce his definite decision.

Merrill contended that the present 2nd District Congressman, Republican Rep. George V. Hansen, is highly vulnerable.

He noted that despite a strong Reagan and Republican tide and against a Democratic candidate, Diane Bilyeu, Pocatello realtor, who only spent about \$25,000, Hansen could only get 56 percent of the votes in the 1980 election.

"It would appear against a well financed Democratic candidate and with the political conditions more favorable for Democrats next year, Hansen could be defeated," said Merrill. "Certainly, Hansen's credibility has been under question for some time, even among many Republicans."

Merrill, who has served six years each in the Idaho Senate and House, is also a member of the influential Joint Finance Appropriation Committee which wields the dominant power in approving state appropriations.

Merrill said he would not want Democratic primary opposition if he does enter as this would

only dilute money and strength for the general election.

He said the only mentioned candidate at present is a Fort Hall Indian attorney, Larry Echohawk, who said he is considering the contest. Echohawk, a member of the Mormon Church, practiced law in Salt Lake City 12 years before coming to Fort Hall to handle the \$16 million legal matters of the Fort Hall Indians, noted Merrill.

Merrill said if he runs he would contemplate spending close to \$200,000, but added some say that it would be even more than that.



Congress candidate?

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STATE SEN. ISRAEL MERRILL, D-Blackfoot, a 12-year veteran in the Idaho Legislature, is considering the 2nd District Congressional race but currently is leaning against it.