The election eye...

Idaho Falls campaign capital of the state

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The political pulse

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Idaho Falls, not Boise, appears the 1980 election campaign capital of Idaho.

At least it seems this way as most of the big political names have been funneled into Idaho Falls and East Idaho to sway voters, particularly in the bubbling U.S. senatorial contest.

All four of the congressional candidates appeared to have concentrated on Bonneville County and adjacent counties of East Idaho but why this has been so has been puzzling, particularly in the Senate race.

Bonneville County will only cast about 25,000 votes in the Nov. 4 general election. All of the 10 East Idaho counties won't total more than 60,000 votes, if that much. That's less than a fifth of the more than 300,000 votes to be cast election day, so why all the fuss around these parts?

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The real reason, of course is the fact that this area is a bellweather and how it goes is pretty much what the state will do. A Democrat winning in Bonneville County, no matter how slight, can be depended on to lead in the state. Conversely, if a Republi can can't capture Bonneville in a statewide or congressional contest, he might just as well go home and do whatever he was doing at the time he thought he had a political future.

Most of the big political guns have tramped the East Idaho turf, led by the biggest one, Ronald Reagan, who was here a week ago.

But there have been other political figures, such as Sens. Henry Jackson, D-Wash., Howard Baker, R-Tenn, Senate minority leader; and Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, Rep. Gunn McKay, D-Utah, and Secretary of Interior Cecil D. Andrus.

Also scheduled to come here and in Blackfoot Thursday for a press conference is National Republican Chairman Bill Brock to help boost Symms and also Republican legislative candidates.

There also have been some lesser lights who have called press conferences, such as Robert Hansberger, prominent Boise businessman, heading the Businessman for Church Committee; the Rev. Charles Fiora, chairman, and Peter B. Gemma, executive director, of the Pro-Life Political Action Committee; Phil Guarino, Washington, director of the senior citizens division of the Republican National Committee; and Lt.Gen. Daniel O. Graham, representing the American Security Council.

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All of the four main contenders have been concentrating on Bonneville County and East Idaho — Democrat Sen. Frank Church and Republican Congressman Steve Symms for the dominant U.S.Senate; and Republican U.S. Rep. George Hansen and Democrat Diane Bilyeu for the 2nd District congress seat.

The senatorial race has been so overwhelming that the legislative and county candidates have had to take a back seat.

This is unfortunate because nearly all of the Bonneville County legislative races and the sheriff contest are interesting, and in in most cases, tight.

Church, Symms, Hansen, Bilyeu, plus Republican Sen. James McClure, were all in the area last week and most of them will spend some time this week.

Actually the big votes lie in Boise Valley where Ada and Canyon counties, the two largest in the state, along with a few adjacent counties, will cast close to 100,000 votes. That's about a third of the state total.

Republican State Chairman Dennis M. Olson, Idaho Falls attorney, had a big hand bringing Reagan, Brock and some others of the political sharpshooters into Idaho Falls.

Church likes to call many of the out-of-state Virginia-based organization representatives as "gunslingers who like to take a potshot at me," insisting Idaho people resent them.

Church, of course, also brought in Jackson and McKay, but he said they are congressional leaders from neighboring states, with about the same ideals and philosophies.

Andrus also appeared in Idaho Falls and Rexburg Monday and Tuesday in Church's behalf.

Hatch, also from neighboring Utah, was here in an effort to help Symms.

Aside from Reagan, it is doubtful if the outsiders helped either Church and Symm much, although it assisted in shoring up their strength. But it serves the added purpose of injecting a certain drama in the election — not that it needs much.