



Post-Register/Robert Brower

Changing of the guard?

SENATE MAJORITY Leader Howard Baker, R-Tenn., left, is shown with Sen. James A. McClure, R-Idaho, now the Senate majority caucus chairman, during an Idaho

Falls press conference in 1981. McClure is now prominently mentioned to replace Baker, who recently announced he would not seek re-election.

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The Post-Register The political pulse

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Idaho's senior senator, soft-spoken James A. McClure, faces the possibility of becoming the leader of the Senate in 1984, but he's not entirely sure he wants it.

The situation developed after Senate Majority Leader Howard Baker announced last month he would not seek re-election in 1984.

"I have mixed emotions about it," said McClure in a Post-Register interview. "It is obvious my primary concern is in doing what I can for the people of Idaho."

McClure said that as chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee and a senior member of the Senate Appropriation Committee, he is in position to help in legislation benefiting Idaho.

"However," he said, "I'm seriously considering the possibility (of becoming Senate majority leader). I must balance the considerations. I think my colleagues also must be considered in my making such an effort."

His status as majority leader would shift more of the burden of seeing to Idaho's needs to other members of the state's congressional delegation.

"It would take more of my time to become majority leader," he said. "This is a job of mostly in administering and leading in floor action in the Senate. You must also relate to the non-Senate world. There are lots of demands on your time."

McClure is the Senate majority caucus or conference chairman, the No. 3 position after the majority leader and assistant majority leader.

Another contender for Senate majority leader is Alaska's Ted Stevens, who holds the assistant majority or party whip post.

Others mentioned as leading contenders are Sens. Pete Domenici, New Mexico, chairman of the budget committee; Richard G. Lugar, Indiana, newly elected conference policy chairman; Paul Laxalt, Nevada, also part-time national party chairman; and Robert Dole, Kansas, finance committee chairman.

McClure said Dole, for example, is happier with his power base as Senate Finance Committee chairman. This also may be the case for other chairmen of the more important Senate committees. McClure said Dole has indicated for that reason he possibly would not seek the majority position.

Backs Reagan policies

McClure still clings strongly to the president's economic programs, which could be a major issue of the 1984 campaign.

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McClure, 58, has had a distinguished and varied public career. He is a native of Payette, a law graduate of the University of Idaho, and practiced law in Payette where he was both city and county prosecuting attorney.

He served three terms in the Idaho Senate, advancing to Senate assistant majority leader.

He was elected to the U.S. House in 1966, and to the U.S. Senate in 1972. That was after a bitter primary fight against four opponents, including Rep. George Hansen, and a tight general election battle against Bud Davis, then the Idaho State University president. Davis soon after left to become president of the University of New Mexico and is now chancellor at the University of Oregon.

Last month, McClure was re-elected to a second term as chairman of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. He is also chairman of the appropriations subcommittee on interior and related agencies.