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The political pulse

The election eye . . .

Republicans ride high Idaho political crest

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The euphoria of victory was starkly evident when virtually everyone who was anybody in the Idaho Republican Party attended the Eastern Idaho Republican Barbecue and Rally here last week.

It was an ideal setting in the cool of Tautphaus Park for the Republicans to savor the fruits of their 1980 election victories, and they took full advantage of it in speeches, dining, singing and applause. A record crowd of more than 800 was on hand, indeed remarkable when it is considered it was held during the height of the vacation season when many are away from home.

Nearly all the top Republican bigwigs were there, including all of the Republican state office holders, Sen. James A. McClure; Congressman George Hansen; Dennis M.Olsen, Idaho Falls, state party chairman; Senate President Pro Tempore Reed Budge, Soda Springs; House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, Twin Falls, and nearly every eastern Idaho legislator.

The only one missing was Sen. Steve D. Symms, who had just returned to his home at Caldwell after three days of holding federal highway hearings at Seattle and Los Angeles, and Congressman Larry Craig, who represents the lst District, which embraces west and north Idaho.

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The keynote speaker, Secretary of Agriculture John R. Block, a soft-spoken Illinois farmer, sounded the appropriate theme by emphasizing that the farm program, as well as other federal policies, are directed to shift the responsibilities back to the people and away from big government.

He stressed the point the entire farm bill is designed to put agriculture back into the hands of the people who are responsible for the production of the nation's food and fiber. He said Reagan is offering the "the same opportunity of individual free enterprise to the entire nation."

McClure, who spoke only briefly, did observe accurately that the gathering was a meeting ground that reflected the diversified industry of eastern Idaho — agriculture represented by Block, and the INEL represented by Shelby Brewer, assistant secretary for nuclear energy.

Hansen remarked that over the past 20 years the political tide has swung to where is was almost even so that now the Republicans dominate as reflected particularly in the all-Republican congressional delegation of four and overwhelming majorities in the Idaho Legislature.

On a more non-partisan note, both McClure and Brewer painted glowing pictures for the future of the INEL, emphasizing newer and perhaps better programs will take their place. The keystone is the strong possibility of the huge multi-billion fast breeder reactor to follow the $3.2 billion Clinch River breeder reactor, which is now virtually assured.

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The Republicans were missing the top state position of which they were painfully aware and which they hope to tuck in their victory bag in the 1982 elections — the governorship. Lt. Gov. Philip E.Batt, who has already announced for the position, and Olmstead, who has said he will formally enter Sept. 8, were on hand but their presence appeared at low key.

The Democrats have held the governorship 12 years, including the remaining year of the present term, and from the way the political pieces are falling it could be for another long stretch.

Gov. John V. Evans at this time looks formidable for re-election in 1982 but certainly not unbeatable. Standing on the wings ready in future years is the popular former governor and U.S. secretary of interior, Cecil D. Andrus, who in his 1974 election won every county save one.

The Republicans hold an enviable postion otherwise to retain their political stranglehold in Idaho in 1982 on the national, legislative and to a lesser extent, on the state and county, levels. However, it may not be so easy next year when the magic Reagan name is missing on the ballot and political conditions can change dramatically as has happened in the past.