The election eye

Evans' try to replace Watt with McClure odd

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What must be one of the strangest political ploys in the 1984 campaign was a recent suggestion by Gov. John V. Evans that Sen. James A. McClure, R-Idaho, replace U.S. Secretary of Interior James Watt, who recently resigned.

Certainly, the governor must have had a tongue-in-the-cheek mein when he came up with the suggestion, although McClure is likely as qualified as anyone to fill that hot spot.

Thursday, it was announced William P. Clark, national security adviser, had been nominated as Watt's successor.

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McClure must of held back gales of laughter when he replied somberly that he was not interested in the appointment.

Would it have been any wonder?.

McClure and the Idaho Republicans would have had much to lose and little to gain from such an occurrence. It made Evans look magnanimous in that he would suggest someone fron the opposite party.

McClure holds the No. 3 position as the Senate Conference (Caucus) Committee chairman, is chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, so important to Idaho, and holds a number of other influential positions. He is a member of the Senate Apppropriations Committee and of the Rules and Administration Committee.

By many political observers, McClure is considered to be the front runner in the race to replace Sen. Howard Baker, R-Tenn., as Senate majorityleader, or at least minority leader if the Republicans should lose Senate control.

Furthermore, he must be considered safe for 1984 re-election facing little more than token opposition from a neophite, Pete Busch, retired Marine colonel and presently a Lewiston realtor.

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The most dramatic change would give Evans the opportunity to appoint a Democrat, giving him the edge also in the 1984 elections. It would have a national impact as it would give Democrats further impetus to control the Senate in 1985, now ruled by Republicans 55-45.

If McClure had assumed Watt's uneasy seat, he would have faced only the assurance of filling the term through 1984 if Reagan should not seek re-election or if he should be defeated.

If Reagan is re-elected, then McClure presumably would have another four years, but after that, what?

Evans would have the opportunity to appoint such Democratic political heavyweights as former Gov. Cecil D. Andrus; Mike Mitchell, Lewiston, a former state senator and who ran a strong lieutenant governor's race in 1982; State Sen. John Peavey, Carey; Treasurer Marjorie Ruth Moon; and Ron Twilegar, Boise attorney and busiessman and former State Senate minority leader. They were all mentioned earlier as possible McClure foes in 1984 but shied away.

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Evans could appoint himself as U.S. senator but that offers complications.

In such case, a Republican, Lt. Gov. David H. Leroy, would take over the helm and that would be something Evans and his Democrats certainly would not view with particular jubilation.

Now, if the lieutenant governor were a Democratic that could be plausible.