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The political pulse

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The election eye

Record shows Evans aided INEL tax break

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Some Republican efforts to paint Democrat Gov. John V. Evans as lukewarm and his Republican adversary, Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt, as the champion of the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory hardly square with the legislative record.

Ann Rydalch, Idaho Falls, state Republican second vice president, made just such a statement at a Bonneville Republican Women meeting here last week and other Republican and business leaders have indicated likewise.

Both Evans and Batt are without doubt hearty supporters for nuclear development at the INEL.

Evans has expressed concern over the possible radioactive waste contamination of the Snake River aquifer but has now agreed the practices are satisfactory. He has even highly complimented the Department of Energy for its cooperation with the state and its diligence in pursuing the radioactive waste management controls.

Actually, the Idaho Legislature has consistently showed its warm support for nuclear energy. In the past session, for example, it passed by overwhelming margins Joint House Memorial 19 which places the Legislature on record urging DOE and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to initiate a program, likely at INEL, to design and standardize a low-cost nuclear reactor plant in the 500 megawatt range. It also approved Senate Memorial 104 encouraging a Replacement Production Reactor be located in Idaho. Idaho is believed the only state to take such a strong pro-nuclear stance.

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The acid test of who was or wasn't the true friend of INEL came late in the 1981 session and again in this year's deliberations. This centered on the highly controversial and much discussed bill that would repeal sales tax exemptions for Idaho National Engineering Laboratory contractors.

It was in the closing days of the 1981 session when Sen. Kermit Kiebert, D-Hope, the assistant minority leader, proposed a bill that would repeal the INEL sales tax exemptions. Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, took the lead in opposing this measure which he said could have meant the loss of as many as 1,200 jobs at the site, plus others that would be indirectly affected.

Two days before the end of the session, Kie-

bert proposed the Senate to vote it out of committee. It ended in a 17-17 tie vote because one of the senators was absent at the time.

It was Batt as lieutenant governor and the Senate presiding officer who broke the tie by voting against INEL and the Republican majority to have the bill brought on the floor. It precipitated a bitter fight the remainder of the session.

The Republican eastern Idaho senators, particularly Watkins, J. Marsden Williams and William Floyd, Idaho Falls, and Vearl Crystal, Rigby, were incensed at Batt for his adverse vote.

Batt explained that his vote was primarily to bring the measure to the floor for debate, but to say it upset the eastern Idaho nuclear community is to put it mildly.

Kiebert sought six times in the closing two days to enact the measure, and each time it received a narrower margin of defeat. It finally failed by only one vote on the last attempt a few hours before the Legislature adjourned. It had earlier passed the House by an overwhelming majority of 56-13, and a number of eastern Idaho state representative voted for it despite the fact it could adversely affect jobs in their communities.

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The controversy flared up again the 1982 session but this time Kiebert submitted the bill to the House Revenue and Taxation Committee, the revenue-producing committee. It was bottled up for a time on the motion for printing on a 8-8 tie vote but during the closing days the committee reversed itself to approve printing on a 10-8 vote.

It was at this point that Evans interceded with his Democratic leadership, primarily Kiebert, not to force the bill for a vote. As a result, it died in committee when there was no effort to vote it out for floor consideration. In view of past votes, if that bill had gone on the floor it likely would have passed handily in the House and even had the advantage in the Senate unless it was be bottled up in committee.

Evans explained his opposition stemmed from the fact no one industry, including the INEL contractors, should be made to suffer by removing sales tax exemptions. Instead, he asserted, if this is to be done, all of the tax exemptions which number upwards of 260 should be reviewed as to what should be repealed to bring more revenue to the state. He is absolutely right. It may be one of the governor's prime financial requests for the 1983 session.