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The political pulse

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The election eye

Evans becomes prime target in campaign

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The stepped up attack on Gov. John V. Evans for his handling of Idaho's finances is a double-edged sword that could bring adverse reverberations to his Republican challenger, Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt.

It certainly is a legitimate campaign issue and it is apparent that Batt must show voters he can do a better job, or else the Idaho voters will naturally re-elect the incumbent. This can apply to any race where an incumbent faces a challenger.

Whether the tactics Gov. John V. Evans used by Batt, the aspiring Attorney General David H. Leroy and other leading Republicans are effective remain to be seen but from this long distant east Idaho glimpse they could backfire badly.

The immediate effect, however, is to enhance Batt's standing in the polls and whether this is temporary is also subject to later campaign developments. Perhaps from his point of view, Batt has everything to win and nothing to lose in seeking to picture the governor as a bungler in state financing.

Polls show that Evans has maintained a consistent lead but not by all that large of margin. Private polls even as late as last week also indicate Evans holding what appears an almost comfortable edge.

A column in the Washington Times, for whatever it is worth, quotes an unnamed "high level" Democratic spokesman as saying Evans is in trouble in Idaho, the only western governor in that position.

The column went on to say the spokesman said "It (Idaho) is basically a conservative state. It's not over, but we're in trouble. I don't see any other Democratic incumbent as being in serious trouble."

The column then goes on to state that Evans

appears in trouble today, principally because of economic troubles in the state and that other Democratic incumbents are safe.

However, National Republican Chairman Richard Richards is quoted in a recent wire story as not that optimistic. He conceded Republicans are in trouble for the governorships, in which Democrats hold a 27-23 edge but the Republicans could lose as many as four. He said the Republican outlook for governorships is bleak because of retirement of Republican incumbents in Iowa, Ohio, Wisconsin, Michigan and Minnesota.

He then mentions the possibility of winning Democratic seats in Montana and Wyoming but doesn't even mention Idaho.

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Issues that hurt Evans to varying degree are the Bunker Hill mine closures which wasn't his fault despite rash statements of Idaho Republican Chairman Dennis M. Olsen but it did occur while he was governor; the Right-To-Work issue which the Freedom to Work Committee based in Virginia seeks to promote; appearances of outside organizations, such as Free Idahoans to Replace Evans Committee (FIRE) which can be expected to fire a flurry of emotional charges; the traditional lack of unity among the Democrats; and the fact there are more Republicans than Democrats in the state and they are far better organized.

On the plus side, Evans holds the office and takes advantage to generate a high profile; that despite Republican charges, he has made no major blunders in piloting the state; that he has a pleasant homey approach that warmly relates to people both on a one-to-one basis and in a large gathering; that he has a war chest of \$500,000 that will far surpass that of his opponent and a strong campaign organization headed by Rose Bowman; and that he has changed his speaking style to make a more impressive impression and avoiding losing his temper, a frequent fault of his before this year.

Of course what happens now is far too early to judge what will result in six weeks. Many have not made up their minds and those whose minds changed once before can be changed again.

