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The election eye

Batt fighting uphill in gubernatorial race

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

One of the most provocative questions posed in this year's Idaho elections centers on how well Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt is doing in his efforts to unseat Gov. John V. Evans.

Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt

Democrats have held the key governor's chair for 12 long years and with Evans seeking re-election it could extend much longer. In addition, it's no secret that Cecil D. Andrus, whose election record shows he was perhaps the most popular of Idaho governors when he served for six years, is standing at the wings looking at the 1986 races. He dearly loved the job and it was with reluctance that he accepted the U.S. secretary of interior post under President Carter but announced it was only for four years, regardless of whether Carter was re-elected or not.

Evans has said repeatedly as long as three months ago this is his last shot for the governorship and it is only natural to believe he may oppose Republican U.S. Sen. Steve Symms in 1986, or perhaps try for 2nd District congressman if a Republican still holds the office.

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Batt, despite his vigorous efforts, faces the the fact that a lieutenant governor has never won the top state position in the past half century and many have tried.

The last attempt was in 1974 when Republican Lt.Gov. Jack Murphy challenged Andrus and was soundly trounced with Andrus amassing 72 percent of the vote and winning every county except Republican-ribbed Lemhi.

Evans moved up from lieutenant governor to governor in January, 1977, but only because Andrus went to Washington. Lt. Gov. Arnold Williams, Rexburg, also a Democrat, did the same when Gov. Charles Gossett resigned to be appointed to the U.S. Senate in 1946. This didn't sit well with the voters and both were subsequently defeated for re-election.

Batt has a adopted rather terse, abrupt speaking style since he became the Republican gubernatorial nominee and felt the weight of his position. It is a sharp departure from his legislative role when he was more relaxed, frequently indulged in humorous dialogues with his colleagues and took a more moderate political approach. In fact, he was considered one of the most moderate of state senators and his present role as a staunch conservative is alien to his political nature.

Batt sometimes overreacts on political issue criticisms.

Since assuming the Republican gubernatorial toga, however, Batt has discarded most of these shortcomings. In his legislative role he was always candid, fair and a gentleman.

He was one of the most personally popular legislators when he served two years in the House, and 10 in the Senate, six of them as majority leader and two as the president pro tem.

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Batt was elected to the No. 2 position two years ago, ousting the Democrat incumbent, William Murphy. However, the office was not to his liking as it removed him from action. He was a lonely figure as the conservative legislative leadership, particlarly Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, did not take him into their confidence on party policies and legislative strategy. This was in marked contrast with previous administrations.

It was obvious he was frustrated because a Democrat, Evans, was in the governor's charge. Actually, Evans and Batt get along well personally but their diffeent party labels necessarily keeps them politically apart.

Past elections show that while issues play an important part in a campaign, personal popularity is usually the deciding factor. Thus Batt must match his style with that of Evans whose homey approachn wins hims hosts of supporters on one-to-one basis or speaking to small groups or large audiences.

The two have come head-to-head on three occasions and the last one Tuesday night in a public service broadcast emanating at Idaho State University served to emphasize their political differences.