

# The Post-Register

## The political pulse

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*The election eye*

# Assessor's office often in limelight

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An assessor's office is generally one of the most prosaic in Idaho's counties and Assessor John J. Wasden usually maintains a low profile but in nearly every recent election it becomes a highly controversial personal issue.

Why this is so is rather perplexing because the job only pays \$21,900 and it has been \$20,000 and lower in recent former years. It's not exactly a position that enables anyone to revel in great wealth and luxury.

The technical and monotonous task of appraising property and selling vehicle licenses is not one that exactly offers a challenge to the most ambitious.

In fact, Wasden says he is losing money for his future Social Security pension because when he retires he is paid on basis of his salary the last five years. It is much lower than what he earned as a former real estate broker.

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Again this year, it's the same story with two veteran players and a newcomer to furnish the main performance for the Nov. 2 show. They include Wasden; an oldtime adversary, Aaron Robinson, and a comparative newcomer, Sherman L. Norris.

This is more than an election for office. There is a deep-seated personal animosity between Wasden and Robinson and now between Wasden and Norris, his former deputy who ran against him and narrowly lost.

In the latest development, Norris, who lost by only 150 votes in the torrid May 25 primary, announced last week he would enter as a write-in independent candidate. He contended Wasden has shown favoritism in both property assessment and personnel, charges Wasden hotly denies.

Both Robinson and Norris have been highly critical of Wasden in their encounters but Wasden contends he has conducted the office according to law and with fairness. Apparently the voters believe him, if only by slim margins.

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The Wasden-Robinson rivalry goes back to 1974 when Wasden sought the position and won the Republican nomination against Elwood



Assessor  
John J. Wasden

Wilkins, then defeated Democrat Thurman Peterson. In the meantime, Robinson who had served as a Republican assessor, chose to run for county commissioner but was beaten by Art Dietrick in the primary. Dietrick was later elected in the general.

In 1976, Robinson was narrowly beaten by a little known contender, Vance Miller, for county commissioner in the Republican primary. He then decided to run as an independent but Democrat Clyde A. Burtleshaw, the Democratic nominee and present chairman, easily won the general by nearly three to one over Miller while Robinson badly trailed in third place.

In 1978, Wasden enjoyed the rare luxury of no primary opposition but Robinson entered as an independent. There was no Democrat contender. Wasden won that election handily 12,542 to 7,405, in their last face-to-face encounter.

There were no assessor or county commissioner District 2 office positions to be voted on in 1980.

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Political observers now wonder if Norris' entry will harm Wasden or Robison the most. It's a fair question.

Going back more than a quarter of a century, this writer can't ever remember an independent winning any contest on the national, state, legislative or local level in Idaho. It appears Idahoans accept only Republicans or Democrats and third party contenders are usually bypassed.

A dozen years ago, the American Party made serious bids for recognition and candidates representing that party waged energetic campaigns in several counties and also for president and governor but they never won, and in most cases, never were even close. Some came close for county offices, particularly in Fremont. Since that time, the third party movement of whatever brand has about disappeared.

The write-in has a problem because his name doesn't appear on the ballot. Instead, the voter must write the name on the envelop containing the computer ballot before dropping into the ballot box. It's a question of how many will go to the trouble of doing this unless they feel strong about it.

An analysis would indicate that Wasden likely will not have much trouble for re-election, even though Norris may draw more Wasden votes than Robinson. This could change if there are unexpected developments in the few short days ahead but that's the way it looks now.