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The political pulse

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The election eye...

Few changes drafted for 1982 elections

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The political kingmakers had many grandiose ideas for the 1982 elections but after the smoke cleared away in the past Idaho Legislature there were no changes.

The lack of action may have far-reaching affects on those who may be seeking office, along with the issues.

In short, the primary election will still be held the fourth Tuesday in May, there is no restrictions on how many candidates can enter a race, and some of the key emotional issues may be missing, although there is certain to be enough to keep the political pot bubbling.

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The Idaho Republican Exective Committee headed by Chairman Dennis M. Olson, in all its wisdom, took a strong hand. It flatly opposed moving the May primary to August or September, wanted convention endorsement for congressional and state elective offices, and favored killing a right-to-work law.

It won two out of three as the measure for moving the primary from May to August or September never got out of the Senate State Affairs Committee and the right-to-work bill was tabled by the full Senate.

However, it lost on the convention endorsement measure as Democratic Gov. John V. Evans sent word he would veto it, and besides that, there were many legislators, including Republican leaders, who objected to the principle of limiting candidates to any office, if they wanted to run.

The Senate also yanked another emotional issue from the public sector when the State Affairs Committee decided to hold two so-called Sagebrush Rebellion bills, feeling there wasn't enough enthusiasm for passage.

The House had passed both the right-to-work and Sagebrush Rebellion measures by lopsided majorities and the action of the Senate was a surprise to many.

There is strong probability, however, both of these measure will reappear for combat in the 1982 legislative session.

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The Republican chieftains are laboring under a delusion if they keep the May primary or limit a field it would help their nominee in the final struggle with the Democrat contender in the November finals.

Olson and other Republican leaders contend the

overcrowded field of six in the 1978 primary nominated a minority candidate, created such an intraparty strife, and drained money that the eventual winner, House Speaker Allan F. Larsen, was weakened in his faceoff with Evans.

They believe that if Vernon F. Ravenscroft, former legislator and state party chairman, who finished a close second, had won the primary, he could have defeated Evans.

This thinking is a fallacy. This can be proved by the fact that Ravenscroft lost to Evans for lieutenant governor in 1974 when neither held the office. It follows to reason that Ravenscroft would have had a lesser chance when Evans held the office of governor four years later and was doing a creditable job.

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Limiting the number of entrants for a race is repugant to most who favor the concept that any potential candidate has the right to run. The Republican plan was particularly selfish because it was geared primarily for the gubernatorial contest. Some 20 years ago, the shoe was on the other foot when the Democrats had the same troubles in having a large field. As a result gambling advocates won the nomination and twice failed narrowly in unseating Republican Gov. Robert E. Smlie.

The Republican measure called for a candidate to have at least 25 percent of the delegates at their biennial convention to qualify as a candidate. In this way, no more than three would be approved for any one race.

The only creditable factor in this requirement would be injecting some interest in party conventions which at present are about as lively as reading minutes at a city council meeting. These conventions are presently restricted to election of officers if they can get anyone willing to serve, adoption of resolutions and platforms which are largely forgotten anyway, and sending delegates to a national convention if they can coax anyone who can afford it.

The issue, however, becomes one of having so many candidates that a minority candidate can, and has been, all too easily nominated. That is a serious problem.

The 1980 election was dominated by a strong conservative tide that brought sweeping Republican victories. It now will be interesting to see if the 1982 elections will see an ebbing or continuance of that tide.