

June 2 1985

# Symms to carry conservative banner

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register columnist

U.S. Sen. Steve Symms, in Idaho the past week to touch bases with his constituents, is proudest of all to consider himself a leading conservative in the Senate.

He left little doubt he will stress this in his re-election campaign next year against his probable opponent, Democrat Gov. John V. Evans.

The free-swinging Symms looks forward — Sen. Steve Symms almost with relish — to the 1986 battle with high confidence.

Because a governor gets a greater exposure in his state, Symms said he felt that Evans should be 10 to 15 points ahead at this time. Instead, in a poll last week, it showed that Evans and Symms are about even.

The 1986 campaign, on basis of Post-Register interviews with Evans and Symms, appears to shape up as one of philosophical differences and personality, although issues will also be important. Each has large devoted followings and it should be one of the keenest campaigns in Idaho history.

"Idaho will be in the national focus in the election and I'm looking forward to it," said Symms.

Symms will carry proudly the conservative banner while Evans will likely press for a more moderate stance.

Despite the fact there will be 22



Republican and 11 Democratic seats in the Senate up for re-election next year, Symms predicts the Republicans will gain two more seats to pad their present margin of three.

"The Republicans may lose a couple of seats but these will be offset by picking four or five more," he said.

Symms said most of the 22 Republican senators coming up for re-election are experienced campaigners, including himself. He pointed out he spent four terms in the House, or eight years, before ousting Democrat Sen. Frank Church in 1980.

He anticipates that if President Reagan accomplishes 80 percent of his goals, he will be about as popular a year hence as he is today.

Especially crucial will be the budget and farm economy issues, said Symms.

"If the budget collapses and the farm economy is down, then the Republicans could lose," he said.

"The Democrats know this. They are not stupid."

Symms said he wants to see enactment of a fair budget in which everyone shares in sacrifices.

Symms lamented the strong partisanship in the Senate, noting the 47 Democrats have voted as a bloc on many major issues.

Symms looks to see Reagan holding a popular standing with the American voters, adding "the Reagan popularity will not hurt me."

Symms numbers several Democratic senators as vulnerable, among them Allan Cranston, of California, and Gary Hart, of Colorado.

He said he already has sent out some 20,000 letters asking for contributions. He said thousands of dollars

have flowed into his warchest, but the exact amount he doesn't know at this time.

He does mention he likely will raise as much as \$3 million, or as he put it, "as much as its needed to get re-elected." Evans did say that Symms may raise \$4 million but that he doesn't see a need to raise as much himself for victory.

If the two do garner that much for their warchests it will be the costliest campaign by far in Idaho history.

Symms, proud of his staunch conservative views, bemoaned the fact that "too many Republican senators are making too many compromises with liberal Democrats."

He pointed out he has sponsored considerable legislation of benefit to Idaho, such as money for grasshopper control, highway funding, and other programs.

As a member of the Senate Finance Committee in his first term — a rare occurrence — he said one of the top accomplishment was the reform of the estate tax, a landmark legislation.

As a highway subcommittee member, he noted he was instrumental in retaining the formula of the 1982 Highway Act. This has continued funding for the nation's vast Interstate system.

It was Symms who got a \$6 million rider to the highway bill last year which is resulting in present reconstruction of the Granite Hill stretch of the Swan Valley highway east of Idaho Falls.

He defended himself against charges by the governor that he voted against farmers, small businessmen, education and social ser-

vice programs and for programs that add to the nation's deficit.

Instead, he said, it has been his general policy to vote against raising taxes for special interest groups and thus reduce interest rates.

"I have voted to reduce the budget so that families will have more money to pay for educating their children, allowing farm families to take loans and to do something for themselves, rather than have the government do it for them," he said.

He said since he took office, senior citizens have enjoyed a 25 percent increase in pensions.

He added that federal revenue has increased the past six years from \$400 billion to about \$745 billion.

"If John Evans were to be in the Senate, he would vote against Ronald Reagan and for those federal programs which add to the deficits," said Symms.

Leaving little doubt he will see re-election with only a formal announcement expected this fall, he also said he hopes to revive his budget plans to reduce deficits by 1989. His plan would freeze the level of pay for all employees of all departments of government, including the military, for three years. It would reduce the federal workforce by 20 percent.

He said according to the Congressional Budget Office, his plan would reduce the deficit to \$12 billion in 1989 and leave of surplus of \$35.8 billion in 1990.

In the meantime, Symms said that more than ever he will hew a deep conservative path leading towards another six-year term to the U.S. Senate.