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The election eye . . .

Mitchell entry sparks 1982 Idaho elections

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The entry of State Sen. Mike Mitchell, D-Lewiston, into the lieutenant governor race will furnish added sparks for the 1982 elections in Idaho which already promise to offer fireworks.

Mitchell is known in the Idaho Legislature as one of the most outstanding lawmakers of the state. Somewhat like Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, he is considered one of the champions of the downtrodden, those who need help because of handicaps, disabilities and age.

He is much more than that, though. As a veteran member of the Legislative Joint Finance Appropriation Committee, he is considered the leading spokesman for the more moderate elements. As such he is in an constant adversary role against the reactionary disciple, Sen. Dean Van Engelen, R-Burley.

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Most lieutenant governor's races are rather dull, but Mitchell can be expected to change this when he opposes the Republican contenders, who likely will be Atty. Gen. David H. Leroy, who has announced, or C.L. "Butch" Otter, who has indicated strong interest.

Mitchell, 56, is a six-term state senator and a former one-term member of the state House of Representatives.

"I have always believed that the citizens of a state are entitled to a decent level of services from the taxes they pay," Mitchell said at a conference at Boise during his announcement last week, and this likely will be one of the key issues in the campaign.

Actually Mitchell, up to recent days, was leaning against running, but his sampling statewide indicates that he has a good chance of election. He believes his entry will assist Democrat Gov. John V. Evans in his bid for re-election.

Another factor is his confidence that his Senate seat will be won by a Democrat in Democratic-dominated Nez Perce County. Signs indicate the present State Rep. Paul Keeton, popular Lewiston attorney, may seek the post.

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Mitchell is considered by his colleagues as the expert in matters of health and welfare. As such he serves on many health-oriented boards and committees.

He said in his announcement "that Idahoans have a right to expect a decent level of support for public education and that senior citizens have a right to expect care and sensitivity from their state goverment.

"I don't believe Idahoans are telling their elected officials to cut government services below the point of decent delivery. I don't believe any citizen wants to cut into the bone and marrow so that government is reduced to a skeleton."

Mitchell, who has served in leadership as the minority caucus chairman, said he is basing his candidacy on "answering the challenge the current economic dilemma presents both to individuals and to state government."

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Although a tough opponent in debate, he also is a warm individual with a host of friends, both inside and outside the legislative halls.

To show their support, attending Mitchell's announcement were a host of former and present Democratic officials.

Mitchell said the "state must expand the economic base so that individual lives will be improved and we can afford, through increased revenues, the decent level of state services we deserve."

Of great importance, he said, the lieutenant governor should "become a fulltime solicitor for this state," by seeking industry interested in locating in Idaho.

Mitchell said he would spend his own money traveling to find new industry. He said the office should not be operated full-time, but he said its priorities should be changed. Mitchell has taken a lead in further export programs for Idaho farmers and manufacturers.

Mitchell said he expects to "do well" in southern Idaho. He said he was pleased following recent trips to the area in which he found he has widespread name recognition.

The 1950 journalism graduate of the University of Oregon said he also expects to have a "full working partner" in Evans. "He's supposed to help me some and I'm supposed to help him some," he added.

"I won't be going down that political road alone," Mitchell said. "With a team like this, even a short little guy from northern Idaho has a chance to be lieutenant governor."

Perhaps Mitchell may not win but his easy, pleasing unorthodox style will furnish entertainment in the campaign, contrasting with the serious, scholarly approach of Leroy or the rather flamboyant campaign tactics of Otter.