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The political pulse

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The election eye

Idaho Democrats feel warm political trend

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Idaho Democrats dominated the political spotlight in Idaho Falls last weekend to trumpet their hopes for November election victories but there were notes of caution despite surface optimism.

The three top Democratic contenders for office, Gov. John V. Evans; State Sen. Mike P. Mitchell, nominee for lieutenant governor; and Richard H. Stallings, Rexburg, candidate for 2nd District congressman, were on hand.

They were fortunate in having such a political heavyweight as Utah Gov. Scott W. Matheson appearing with Evans to speak at his fund-raising dinner Thursday night. Matheson is slated to take over as chairman of the prestigious National Governor's Association next month and has served as chairman of the Western Political Governors Conference.

His imposing credentials can be viewed in the light of his re-election by a decisive margin in 1980 when Utah Democrats were falling like flies in the face of a tremendous Republican-Reagan surge.

In Utah, he is the only elected state Democratic officer and faces an almost impossible task to cope with a Legislature that has the heaviest Republican majority of any state, 22 to 7 in the Senate and 59 to 16 in the House.

This even exceeds Idaho which must have the second largest Republican majority in the nation, 23 to 12 in the Senate and 56 to 14 in the House. Evans also is joined by two other Democratic elective officers, Auditor Joe Williams and Treasurer Marjorie Ruth Moon.

On the national level, the Democratic Party opened its 1982 comeback campaign in its mini-convention last week at Philadelphia by attacking President Reagan, with House Speaker Thomas O'Neill accusing Reagan as being the biggest budget buster in history. He said "Reaganomics is unfair and that the



Gov.
Scott W. Matheson

working poor, elderly and the crippled have been its first casualties."

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Evans, Mitchell and Stallings expressed high optimism over their chances of election in the Nov. 2 general election. However, it was noticeable they feel that although there are signs of a Democratic trend it is not as strong as they wish despite the slumping national economy.

The Democratic spokesmen express hope for an economic recovery for the good of the nation but, if it doesn't come, they agreed it may work in their favor.

Matheson, in his dinner talk, expressed bitter resentment that Reagan had shifted responsibility of many federal programs to the states, but cut them 25 percent or more, rather than the 10 percent they recommended, and gave them no flexibility. He said other governors, both Republicans and Democrats, are miffed. It comes at a time when the states are also in the throes of an economic slump and presently 25 states already have had to raise taxes.

Matheson labeled the Reagan tax bill as a colossal failure and asserted it triggered the present economic slide because it lost the support of Wall Street and the bankers. He described Reaganomics as "a massive failure" and said there must be a change of direction if the nation's economy is to improve.

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The Democratic leaders noted the enthusiastic crowd at the Democrat dinner as another sign the party is rebounding from the ashes of smashing 1980 defeats.

Stallings remarked the Democratic trend "is only a breeze now but should reach a strong gale by election time" to blow away Republican incumbents.

Of the three contenders, most observers feel that Evans holds a solid advantage for reelection over Lt. Gov. Phil Batt; Stallings is locked in a tight race with Rep. George Hansen and may be trailing slightly at present, while Mitchell is waging a tough uphill struggle against the well entrenched Attorney General David H. Leroy for lieutenant governor.

All agree it will take diligent campaign work by volunteers but they are heartened by the fact that thousands of new faces in the state are flocking to their banners to help the Democratic cause.