

Stallings seeks to win crucial independent voters in Idaho

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

San July 25, 1982

Richard H. Stallings, who seeks to leave the staid classrooms at Ricks College to become a congressman in the hustle and bustle at the nation's capital, makes no secret that he is especially concentrating on winning the independent vote.

Stallings, a robust, energetic 41-year-old candidate, hardly typifies a college instructor.

He has always been interested in politics and ran two fairly close races for the state Legislature in District 31, a heavy Republican area. He also had the disadvantages of residing in the remote Lyman precinct south of Rexburg. Only Lyman and Archer precincts from Madison County are included in District 31 which is made up primarily of east Bonneville and Teton counties.

He also managed the campaign of Stan Kress for Congress which gave him an excellent insight into the political campaigning process.

* * *

In a nutshell, Stallings is bidding for the majority of the crucial 10 to 15 percent of the so-called independent voters.

Stallings also hopes to win the moderate Republicans who do not feel comfortable with the ultra conservative followers who have increasingly dominated the party since Republican Gov. Robert E. Smylie was ousted 15 years ago.

Stallings figures his election strategy this way: His opponent, Republican Congressman George V. Hansen, has about 45 percent hard core followers but he also has about 42 percent who would vote against him regardless who is his opponent. That leaves about 17 percent who will decide the election.

These are only approximate figures and could vary as much as 5 percent one way or another but it gives a rough idea of the political situation in the 2nd District Congress race.

About the same situation faced Democrat Sen. Frank Church in 1980 and when a formidable candidate and political conditions came about, he was toppled.

Stallings said that in 1980 when there was a strong Reagan and Republican tide, Hansen ran the weakest of any major Republican candidate. He only polled 58 percent of the votes against Democrat Diane Bilyeu, Pocatello realtor.

Mrs. Bilyeu spent only some \$30,000, about a fourth of what it cost Hansen, and waged a less than spectacular intensive campaign.

Stallings comes from the Upper Snake River Valley which generally decides elections, has strong backers from all religious affiliations, including those of his own Mormon Church; and is spending full time campaigning.

Mrs. Bilyeu had the disadvantage of coming from Pocatello which is heavily Democratic anyway; and frankly, records show that a significant portion of voters in east Idaho will not vote for a woman for high office.

Another important factor is shifting 21,500 people in Ada County from the 1st to the 2nd district under congressional reapportionment this year. These are largely Democratic precincts in the northern and western sections of Boise which Hansen has never won, and even lost by 2-1 margins.

Stallings hopes to overcome the money and incumbency disadvantages by wearing out a lot of shoe leather in personal campaigning throughout the 26 south Idaho counties in his district. He expects to personally meet most of the voters in this fashion.