

The Post-Register

The political pulse

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Section B

The election eye . . .

Election campaigning gets off to a slow start

BY BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

It's refreshing to find after a three weeks vacation that the 1982 Idaho election is off to a slow start and likely will remain that way until fall.

That's a contrast with the 1980 campaign when both Sen. Frank Church and Congressman Steve Symms opened warfare a full 18 months before the general election and didn't let up much until the ballots were counted.

It also is different than in the 1978 campaign when an overcrowded field of six sought the Republican gubernatorial nomination and also started their electioneering more than a year ahead of the primary.

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This year, despite the fact interest centers on the Republican gubernatorial nomination only one candidate has formally announced — Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt. So far, he's had the field pretty much to himself but his campaigning has been generally at low key as he has no formal contenders yet.

Almost certain to enter is House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, but he has delayed his expected announcement until fall. Three other possibilities haven't as yet disclosed their plans but they likely are waiting until this fall to find out how extensive is their support and who will finally enter the primary. These three possible hopefuls are Attorney General David H. Leroy; former legislator and state Republican chairman Vernon F. Ravenscroft; and former House Speaker Allan F. Larsen. Larsen has almost taken himself out of the race but until he does he must be considered a prospect.

Most political observers feel Leroy will confine his efforts to lieutenant governor so that he can embark in a full-fledged private practice, yet keep in the political limelight. From his long distance view, his chances of winning the position appear about even against Republican C.L. "Butch" Otter, Boise, Simplot executive and former legislator and 1978 gubernatorial contender; and Democrat State Sen. Mike Mitchell, Lewiston.

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The congressional races may furnish more than usual interest this year because of congressional redistricting which will shift some 40,000 First District voters into the 2nd District. This will present a tough test for Republican Congressman George V. Hansen who has run poorly in Ada County, about half of which might be shifted to the 2nd District.

Already two prominent Democrats have indicated they are eying the position, State Sen. Israel Merrill, Blackfoot, and Kelly Pearce, present director of the Department of Law Enforcement and an earlier contender for the position.

It's probable these two may discuss the situation to avoid a costly intraparty scramble but if both are interested they also must jump into the race by fall in advance of the May primary.

Both incumbent Republican congressmen, Hansen, and Larry Craig, in the 1st District, are not expected to be opposed for their party nomination, although there could be some last minute surprises. At present they would appear to hold the favored role to win re-election.

At any rate, the voters get a rest from an intensive summer campaign this year as compared with the 1978 and 1980 campaigns.

Olmstead delays entry until fall

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BY BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

TWIN FALLS—House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, said Tuesday he had decided to delay his announcement for the Republican gubernatorial nomination until fall.

He said he decided on the postponement in view of the special Legislature session scheduled to begin July 7.

He explained by keeping his announcement in wraps it would give him a freer hand to devote his attentions to the special session, without the political overtone.

"A special session with several announced candidates for governor would not be in the best interest of the people," he said.

Olmstead also announced that Ben Spencer, a Utahn who has worked as Northwest field coordinator for the Republican National Committee, will be his fulltime campaign manager beginning June 1.

Olmstead said the delay of his entry also will help shorten the gubernatorial campaign.

Although Olmstead has delayed his formal announcement, he said he has been appearing in a number of events through the state. For example, he spoke to the Kellogg High School graduating class and is appearing at a number of political events in north Idaho this week.

These have been funded by early contributions to the Friends of Olmstead Committee. He said about \$10,000 has been raised.

Olmstead said he plans to finish his mail solicitation for funds later in the summer.

Olmstead indicated that regardless of who enters he has decided to jump into the race, an abrupt turnaround of his earlier views.

"There is no question now but that I will be a candidate," he said.