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The political pulse

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Legislative limelights

Keen contests loom for committee spots

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Although contests for legislative leadership grab the most headlines, the election of committee chairmanships and appointments to key committees also carry considerable weight.

Most of the present committee chairmen are expected to be re-elected without opposition but there are a number of vacancies because some legislators are not seeking re-election, a few were defeated and others may want leadership or other committee assignments.

Also a large crop of freshmen will be seeking key committee assignments and their votes for contested races for House speakership or Senate president pro tem will determine if they get them. New are some 20 state representatives and eight state senators.

The Senate president pro tem and House speaker have the exclusive power of appointments of chairmen and committee assignments in their respective chambers, although they generally confer with the other legislative leaders.

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There are chairmanship vacancies in three Senate committees and two House committees but present committee chairmen seeking leadership slots could open up at least three more Senate committee chairmanships and two in the House. There are nine standing committees in the Senate and 13 in the House.

Aside from those holding leadership positions, most senators are given two committees assignments and most House members are assigned three committee. Each is allotted a position on what is considered one major committee and one or two minor committees.

There are Republican contests for Senate president pro tem and House speaker but top Democrats are unopposed. They include Sen. Kermit Kiebert, D-Hope, to vault from assis-

tant Senate minority leader to minority leader, and Rep. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, to be re-elected House minority leader after Rep. Patricia McDermott, D-Pocatello, told this writer she would not challenge Hammond after earlier hinting she might.

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Committee chairmanship vacancies exist in the Senate in Judiciary, State Affairs and Transportation, and in the House in Health and Welfare and State Affairs because of election defeats or incumbents not seeking re-election.

Republicans control both chambers, 51-19 in the House and 21-14 in the Senate.

In the Senate, committee chairmen defeated for re-election were Sen. Edith Klein, R-Boise, Judiciary, and Sen. Leon Swenson, R-Nampa, State Affairs, while Sen. Dean Abraham, R-Nampa, Transportation, did not seek re-election.

In the House, committee chairmen not seeking re-election were Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, Health and Welfare, and Rep. George Danielson, R-Cambridge, State Affairs.

Other committee chairmanship vacancies may result in the Senate because Sens. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, Commerce and Labor; Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, Local Government and Taxation; and Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, Natural Resources, are mentioned as possible candidates for majority leader or assistant majority leaders.

In the House, committee chairmanships may open because Reps. Tom W. Stivers, R-Twin Falls, Judiciary, and Steve Antone, R-Rupert, Revenue and Taxation, are announced contests for speakership.

In any event, there are certain to be a number of changes in leadership, committee chairmanships and committee assignments.