

The Post-Register

The political pulse

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The election eye

East Idaho didn't swing close election

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

In past tight elections, eastern Idaho, particularly Bonneville County, has been the crucial swing area but it wasn't in Tuesday's general election.

In fact, it appeared the eastern Idaho voters were out of step with the rest of the state in the close gubernatorial and state auditor contests.

Only in the comparatively close 2nd District Congressional fight did east Idaho decide the result but if the remainder of the state had voted on this it is likely that Democrat Richard Stallings would have won.

This is in stark contrast with most past years when east Idaho in general and Bonneville in particular has been a bellweather county. For example in 1980, Bonneville gave Republican Steve Symms a 3,000 vote edge in reversal of what it had done previously for Democrat U.S. Sen. Frank Church. This 6,000 vote shift gave Symms the narrow 4,000-vote victory.

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As observed previously, the emotional right-to-work proposal is a two-edged sword and this time is hacked in favor of Democrat Gov. John V. Evans and against his Republican adversary, Lt.-Gov. Philip E. Batt.

Batt and his supporters promoted the right-to-work issue assiduously in east Idaho, even to the point of distributing thousands of copies through state newspapers of a comic book picturing Evans as a puppet of big labor.

Effectiveness of the comic book likely was more bad than good but Right-to-Work was backed by a large segment of east Idaho voters. However, it also aroused the ire of union people who then urged their people to register and vote, something they often neglect to do in past elections. As a result, Batt's winning margins in Bonneville, Bingham and Jefferson counties were narrowed and Butte even gave Evans a

majority, the only east Idaho county that did.

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Evans lost Bonneville County by about 2,500 votes and the 10 east Idaho counties by 7,500 which should have been enough to have given Batt the victory but didn't.

That's because the strong labor union forces in Pocatello, Lewiston and northern panhandle came out in large numbers to favor Evans. Evans thus won Bannock county almost 2-1 for a 7,000 vote margin, New Perce by better than 2-1 edge for a 5,000 vote cushion, and Shoshone County in the mining district almost 2-1 for a 1,500 vote advantage.

While Batt may have held a slight edge in south Idaho, it was north Idaho that swung the balance to Evans' direction. This included the labor people in the lumbering and mining industries.

The results thus belies Idaho Republican Chairman Dennis Olsen's repeated campaign statements that Evans had not taken proper action in preventing closure of Bunker Hill and other mines. Shoshone County where is located Bunker Hill voted heavily for Evans, 3,963 to 2,519.

Curiously, Ada County voters might just as well stayed at home. They almost split even in the governor's race, just as they did in the Church-Symms contest two years ago. Evans won Ada 32,230 to 31,822, a skimpy 418 vote edge. Symms two years ago won Ada County by less than 200.

The Post-Register received more than 30 letter from Bunker Hill employees or their families during the campaign saying they supported Evans for his efforts in their behalf. The Post-Register's letter to editor policies are not to use letters outside of its circulation area unless it touches on a local situation.

Thus, it's ironical that the right-to-work issue on which Batt depended so heavily in the closing days to carry him to victory actually sealed his doom.