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The political pulse

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The election eye

Incumbency, GOP labels mean victory

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An analysis of the Nov. 2 general election again reaffirmed that those candidates who have incumbency or Republican labels have tremendous advantages. Those who have both are almost impossible to beat.

Thus, it takes no genius to predict victors in contests, but always make allowances for factors that bear on the election, such as Right-to-Work, moral and other emotional issues, size of vote and personal appeal. It has been the case in past elections and it certainly held the pattern in last week's balloting.

While the Republican label is important in east Idaho, meaning the 10 counties north of Pocatello, it is less true in such Democratic strongholds at Pocatello and most of north Idaho.

Over the past dozen years, populous Ada County which was once a Republican bastion is now about evenly split. This is affirmed rather graphically when the county was evenly divided in the key gubernatorial race between Democrat Gov. John V. Evans and Republican challenger, Lt. Gov. Phil Batt, and in 1980 between Democrat Sen. Frank Church and Republican Steve Symms.

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The Democrat state incumbents, Evans, Auditor Joe Williams and Treasurer Marjorie Ruth Moon, were running against a strong Republican tide but their incumbency pulled them to victory. Evans squeaked by Batt 164,851 to 161,274, Williams nudged by Nolan G. Young 158,790 to 153,073 and Miss Moon had less trouble in drubbing Republican Doyle Miner 188,722 to 129,325.

The Democrats who lacked this advantage met failure, going on the time-worn premise that everything being about equal, the Republican will win. As a result, Republican Attorney General David H. Leroy, who held the added edge of being a state officer seeking a different position, vanquished Democrat State Sen. Mike P. Mitchell 168,067 to 139,857, and Republican Jim Jones of Jerome slid by Democrat J. D. Williams, Preston, 162,220 to 154,346.

Auditor Williams, with the all-time record of

24 years service, the most of any state officer in Idaho, has usually led the ticket. However, his margin of victory was drastically slashed this year because of his 78-year-old age and Young also trumpeted his CPA credentials.

Miss Moon did not have an age factor against her while her opponent waged a less intensive campaign and consequently she won rather handily.

Jones simply won because of his greater exposure in running twice before for 2nd District congressman, more money, and with the right party label.

The two Republican congressman, George Hansen and Larry Craig, won but by not a large margin. This was apparently due to voter dissatisfaction of the national economy. Hansen, who also has personal financial problems, prevailed over Democrat Richard Stallings 83,910 to 76,601, or 52 percent; and Craig triumphed over Democrat Larry LaRocco 86,165 to 74,423, 54 percent.

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Primarily because of the Right-to-Work issue, the Democrats picked up two seats in the Senate and five in the House, placing the lineup at 21-14 in the Senate and 51-19 in the House. Democrats gains were scored mainly in Bannock County, Boise area, and north Idaho where labor unions aroused a larger vote than usual.

It is also to the credit of Idaho voters they apparently studied the three initiatives and eight constitutional amendments and approved them by decisive majorities. Only the public lands amendment which drew varied but vague interpretation on "maximum financial basis" was controversial.

The three initiative authorizing residential tax exemption, legalizing denturists and proclaiming the state as pro nuclear engendered mild debate.

The approximate vote of 330,000, or about 69.7 percent, was excellent for an off-year election. It was well above the 56.5 percent off-year election in 1978, below the all time record of 76.7 percent in the 1980 presidential election but still above the 68.1 percent in the 1976 presidential vote.