

Symms confident he'll be elected to a second term

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Sen. Steve D. Symms looks with eagerness to his re-election campaign next year, believing he is in the mainstream of the Idaho political philosophy and is set to score a victory.

Idaho's junior senator repeatedly emphasizes his conservative leanings, pointing with pride to the fact that he is among the leading U.S. senators in this regard.

He sees his probable opponent, Democrat Gov. John V. Evans, as formidable, but Symms leaves little doubt that he is confident he can win re-election by an impressive margin.

"I'm right on target for what they (Idahoans) want," he said while in Idaho Falls during the congressional recess. "This district is against big government and wants the budget reduced. That's the president's slogan and it's what I want."

He contends that Evans, at a recent Democratic governors' meeting at Washington, voted for a resolution that called for federal budget increases.

"He wants more money for the entitlement programs," said Symms. "I ask where are we going to make the cuts? We have two seats from Idaho. If Evans were in the Senate, he would cancel Sen. McClure's vote."

"I would rather be running for election on my efforts to cut big government, rather than support what Evans wants, because the rank and file of the Idaho voters favor my approach."

The Symms views will give Idaho voters a clear-cut choice. It goes down to the wire primarily as a clash in philosophies.

Symms wants to cut entitlement programs and he also favors no automatic increases for Social Security.

Evans seeks a more moderate approach for keeping most entitlement (human service) programs and favors the automatic Social Security hikes.



Steve Symms

Symms' seat is one of 22 Republicans must defend in 1986 against a determined Democratic bid to retain control of the Senate. The Republicans at present hold only a slim three-vote margin.

Symms, 48, was a fruit rancher when elected to Congress in 1972 with a promise "to take a bite out of government." He won the Senate seat in 1980 to some extent on Reagan's coattails, topping Democrat Sen. Frank Church by 4,200 votes. But Reagan won't be on the ballot next year.

A recent Democratic campaign

poll gives Symms only a slender 48-44 percent advantage, which is not much for an incumbent.

Symms challenges this. He contends Evans should be some 10 or 15 points ahead because he gets greater exposure as governor in Idaho while Symms must work from his distant Washington base.

In any event, it looks like less than 10 percent of the electorate is undecided. That means 40,000 out of a registered electorate of something over 400,000 will swing the election.

Symms said he will spend as much as it necessary to win, maybe up to \$3 million. Evans has acknowledged he can't match this and doesn't have to, but he is planning on a war chest of \$2 million.

So far, Symms said, he has raised about \$700,000. Evans' latest figures show about \$85,000 available.

"I'm well ahead of my goal of 1979," Symms said, referring to his campaign against Church.

He said a campaign must have three strong segments — the candidate, money and organization. "I am strong in all three," Symms said. "People tell me to keep up my good work."

A strong Reagan backer, Symms said he favors tax reform. He pointed out that in his key slot in the Senate Finance Committee he would alter some of Reagan's recommendations that would be detrimental to Idaho's timber, mining and agriculture industries.

Symms' program calls for a 30 percent tariff on Canadian timber, trimming it by 5 percent in each of the two succeeding years.

He scoffs at the Evans approach of compromises. He noted Evans is co-chairman with British Columbian Premier William Bennett of a U.S.-Canadian Trade Task Force, a result of the recent National Governors Association Conference in Boise.

"Evans wants to talk to Bennett about reducing voluntarily the Canadian timber exports," Symms said. "I can tell you right now that Bennett won't do anything."

Regarding Idaho Republican charges that The Post-Register and the Idaho State Journal at Pocatello were biased in their coverage by favoring Democrats, Symms said he was surprised at the charges.

However, he said he thought that in some cases Evans and the Democrats got more publicity. He said the Harry Truman banquet got wide state publicity, while his own birthday party attended by about 1,500 was not even covered by the press.

It's still a long time before the November 1986 election. But from this far corner it would appear that where candidates' abilities and issues are fairly even, as in this case, the advantages would favor the Republican because Idaho is a heavily Republican state.