

Elections, Legislature top news in '84

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register columnist

The 1984 political year was dominated by the apparent narrow defeat of controversial seventh-term Congressman George Hansen after one of the bitterest campaigns in Idaho history.

Hansen has not taken his defeat graciously and has pressed for recounts and filed lawsuits in what appear to be desperate efforts to hang onto his seat.

As of now, Hansen's opponent, Rexburg history professor Richard Stallings, holds a 170-vote edge out of the more than 202,000 votes cast and it appears that Hansen's court fights and his appeal to the House Congressional Committee face dim prospects of success.

Hansen is beset by many financial troubles. Records show he owes more than a third of a million dollars to banks and individuals. It is possible some of these creditors might seek payments of overdue loans.

He has appealed his conviction on four counts of filing false financial disclosures, for which he has been sentenced up to 15 years in prison and fined \$40,000.

Landslide

Aside from Hansen, and a few other races, the Nov. 6 general election was a Republican landslide.

President Ronald Reagan, Sen. James A. McClure and 1st District

Congressman Larry Craig all were victorious by about about two to one margins in Idaho.

The Republicans garnered 28 Senate seats, assuring a veto-proof Senate, compared to 14 for the Democrats.

Republicans overwhelmingly control the House 67-17, but they have held topheavy margins in the lower chamber the past half dozen years.

In Bonneville County it was a Republican sweep except for the reelection of Sheriff Dick Ackerman, a Democrat.

Two Republican write-ins for Bonneville County commissioner, incumbent Tom Loertscher and John Kirk, failed in their attempts to upset Republican nominees, Clifford Long and incumbent Wylie Snarr. Loertscher mounted one of the most ambitious write-in campaigns ever seen locally.

The Republican dominance statewide is so great there isn't a single Democrat House member in southern Idaho except Dwight Horsch of Pocatello.

Bonneville County voters turned down a proposal to discontinue the county hospital board, but its future remains in question, in view of the fact that in another special election earlier in the year, voters turned down a \$44 million bond proposal for a county hospital by better than a 2-1 margin.

Initiative 1 to exempt the food sales tax and House Joint Resolution 5 to divide county boundaries for legislative reapportionment were defeated decisively. Only Senate Joint Resolution 117, to give the Idaho Legislature constitutional authority over the State Water Plan, passed.

It was commendable that 83 percent of the 37,151 registered voters, or 30,835, trooped to the polls in Bonneville County. This was just under the all-time record of 86 percent four years ago.

On the school front, some 40 school districts, or about a third of the 116 in the state, passed override levies. This included a half dozen in eastern Idaho.

Legislature

The 1984 Idaho Legislature furnished some headlines after an 83-day session, the fourth longest on record.

It passed a 1-cent sales tax increase, or from 3 to 4 cents, and a record budget of \$550 million.

It also passed a new legislative reapportionment plan that later was invalidated by the courts. A court-apportioned proposal was the one used for the general election. It did not split county lines and it increased legislative membership by 21, or from 105 to 126 by creating seven new floterial districts.

Also passed was the public school reform bill, which appropriated

\$20.3 million to raise salaries for teachers and other certified employees up to 60 percent of what the average teacher salaries were in 1982.

The bill also created a career ladder for teachers, which the state was to fund this year. The bill required annual teacher evaluations, called for school districts to establish discipline codes, and required achievement for high school juniors starting in 1987.

Because of the state financial shortfall, most of the salary increase for teachers and the career ladder provisions apparently will not be fully implemented by the 1985 Legislature.

The general fund budget gave \$230 million to public schools and \$78.9 million for colleges and universities, well below what Gov. John Evans recommended.

Also passed was a bill to spend \$9 million of the 1984 surplus money for school programs and construction of state buildings.

INEL exemption

A compromise bill repealed Idaho National Engineering Laboratory exemptions for fuel reprocessing, but maintained it for research and development. It is estimated it will raise about \$750,000 for the state.

The governor and most state legislative leaders gave the Legislature mixed reviews but the consensus appeared to indicate it was generally a productive session in view of the tight revenues.