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The political pulse

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The election eye . . .

Hot issues skimpy for primary election

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Political workers in the field report they are dismayed at the apathy expressed by large blocs of voters for the May 25 primary election.

They add that it is even worse than in previous primaries.

Many say they don't even know the names of the Republican gubernatorial contenders and have no firm opinion on whom they would vote for. They know even less the primary contestants for the Legislature and county offices.

With the election less than two weeks away, this is indeed a serious situation in Idaho which generally has one of the best voting records of any state.

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Interest has never been keen in primaries but the lack of issues and races has made the one this year even less enticing. As observed previously, the presidential nomination primary in 1980 and an emotional scrap in the Republican gubernatorial contest in 1978 did coax out a fairly respectable number of voters. They amounted to about 40 percent in each of those two primaries, which is not bad.

The only statewide race of some interest is between Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead but some campaign workers have said many voters, amazingly, have told them they have never heard of the two, particularly Olmstead.

They view the few local primary races as mostly of personal appeal, with little to choose regarding philosophies and interest.

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The dialogue between Batt and Olmstead indicates Olmstead as the more conservative while Batt appears the more willing to reach compromises. From this far east Idaho view, it would appear either is acceptable to the bulk of the Republicans.

There is an interesting side development on this race in Jefferson County, which voting records and the make up of its legislative delegation show it to be one of the most conservative in the entire state.

Olmstead two years ago as House speaker appointed Rep. Ray Infanger, R-Salmon, as an interim co-chairman of the Joint Finance-Appropriation Committee. However, Infanger later joined the forces in behalf of the conservative Rep. Dan Emery for House speaker against Olmstead. Emery was soundly beaten by Olmstead in the voting at start of the session.

Olmstead then appointed Rep. Kitty Gurnsey, R-Boise, as the chairman who was next in seniority as the House Appropriations Committee. In addition he skipped over Infanger's seniority and named Rep. Mack Neibauer, R-Paul, as vice chairman, to add insult to injury.

Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, who is retiring from the Legislature, also felt Olmstead's wrath four years ago. When Tibbitts threw his support against Olmstead for speakership, Olmstead replaced him as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. This is a position of little value anyway and serves only at pleasure of the speaker.

The actions against the two state representatives in District 20 has aroused the ire of many devout Republicans. This district is made up of Jefferson, Lemhi, Clark and Counter counties.

It would appear then most Republicans will vote heavily for Batt. This is a serious setback for Olmstead who needs the staunch conservative votes as represented in District 20 to have a chance against Batt. Much of this Olmstead opposition also could extend to neighboring Upper Snake River Valley counties, including the key one of Bonneville.