

The national scene

McClure holds advantage for Senate majority leader

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Idaho's U.S. Sen. Jim McClure believes frankly he has a better than even shot at becoming the Senate majority leader in the new Congress to convene in 1985.

The spot becomes vacant because Majority Leader Howard Baker, of Tennessee, has announced plans for not seeking re-election.



Of course, James A. McClure there are lots of imponderables such as the Republicans losing control of the Senate in the 1984 elections, possible Republican casualties who have indicated McClure support in the 1984 elections, some of the apparent present candidates withdrawing, and the ebb and surge of the popularity of the present probable contenders.

Besides McClure, those mentioned in the running are Sens. Ted Stevens, Alaska; Richard Lugar, Ind.; Robert Dole, Kan., and Pete V. Domenici, N.M.

When asked in a Post-Register telephone interview from his Washington office what are his chances, McClure replied "50-50 or better."

McClure is well known for his conservative predictions and for him to make that sanguine a state-

ments means he likely feels he will win it.

"It is hard to measure this thing now," said McClure. "Who will be there after the election? You know, the last time there was a race, Baker beat Bob Griffin, of (Michigan) by only one vote. In those last few days that election was in the balance."

McClure pointed out some of the senators on whom they are now depending for support may be defeated for re-election or may change their minds.

McClure himself faces re-election but the opposition against him is lightly regarded and he is a heavy favorite to win by 2-1 margin or better. The only active Democrat candidate so far is Pete Busch, Lewiston realtor.

Regarding control of the Senate, McClure said "I feel better about it now than I did two or three months ago."

For one thing, the recent death of Democrat Henry Jackson and his replacement by Republican Dan Evans in Washington state gives the Republicans a 55-45 margin. It means the Democrats would have to pick up five seats to win control if a Democratic president is elected and six if the Republicans

retain control of the presidency.

The foremost competition likely would come from Senate Majority Whip Stevens, who holds the present No. 2 spot and was the earliest-declared candidate to replace Baker.

McClure hold the No. 3 position as majority conference or caucus chairman and Lugar is just behind as campaign committee chairman.

Dole is the powerful chairman of the Finance Committee and Domenici is chairman of the Budget Committee.

Dole, an unsuccessful 1980 presidential contender, who was thought lukewarm to the idea as first, is now actively seeking the position, noted McClure.

Wire reports say McClure may start from the strongest power base of anyone, which already establishes him as the front-runner. That's because he is considered the most conservative, a philosophy that dominates the Senate Republicans.

McClure already has established a record as being the only Idaho member of Congress who has won a leadership position. Going to the top position would add further laurels.

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