Hansen campaign poses sparks

Sun. Aug 1, 1982

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

When big George Vernon Hansen enters a campaign, the electors are usually certain to be entertained with a flood of verbal fireworks.

The Republican U.S. representative from the 2nd congressional district is now preparing to thwart the stiff challenge from Democratic Richard H. Stallings, Ricks College history instructor.

In his latest foray in Idaho Falls Tuesday he exuded high confidence over his re-election chances for a seventh term. While he was here for the bulb turbine dediction, he parried thrusts occasioned by the Wall Street Journal in questioning the financial dealings of himself and his wife, Connie. He dismissed the charges as the "same trashy stuff" that is raised at election time but evaded questions on whether the newspaper's statements were true or not.

George V. Hansen

He emphasized he is under no sort of federal investigation by the House Ethics Committee or federal investigative agencies and that the entire affair is promoted by his political enemies who are considerable.

* * *

His statements that the finacial dealings of he and his wife are private, however, are open to questions. Hansen as a congressman is in the public eye and his financial affairs must be open to the public. That's why there are laws to require reporting campaign contributions and activities. Most major office holders voluntarily disclose even their private financial affairs.

His tactics mostly swirl around emotional issues, centering on conservatism and reduction of big government. Voting records show he rates as one of the top conservatives in the lower house.

Hansen, a six and one half footer weighing some 250 pounds, walks tall and carries lots of weight in Washington. He is a rough and tumble fighter with an unorthodox style reminiscent of a southern minister spellbinder.

When aroused as he was in last Tuesday's press conference to respond to the Journal's allegations, he used staccato-like phrases that kept reporter's pencils moving feverishly to take notes.

This is the kind of battle he relishes and he will attempt to turn it to his own advantage to show that as an isolated Idahoan he is target of the nasty big business eastern interests. He undoubtedly feels it will help, rather than handicap him, in what could be a tough re-election fight.

Yet, before the campaign is over he likely will be forced to disclose to Idaho voters some of his financial dealings, including those of his wife.

Stallings said regarding Hansen's financial troubles, "I don't want to comment and I hope this doesn't obscure the real campaign issue which is the failing economy."

State Chairman Dennis M.Olsen's statement carried some truth when he commented "this sort of campaign tactics make George even stronger."

* * *

Hansen has never lost a race for the 2nd District Congress seat, even the first time in 1964 when he was considered an outsider. At that time it was necessary to get 20 percent of the party convention vote and he barely received them with a couple votes to spare, mostly through sympathy.

As it turned out, he defeated the topheavy favorite, the late Dick Smith, Rexburg wheat grower and former state senator in the primary and then went on to oust the Democrat incumbent, Ralph Harding in the general.

Previous to this, Hansen was an obscure insurance agent and mayor of Alameda, a city which since has been annexed to Pocatello.

He has been defeated twice but it was in his attempts to win a Senate seat. The first time was in 1968 by Democrat Sen. Frank Church, and in the 1972 primary by James A. McClure, then a congressman. In the interim while out of office, he served with the United States Department of Agriculture as deputy undersecretary and national administrator of state and county operations. He also returned to Pocatello as an insurance agent and owner of a fast printing office business.

He returned to Congress in 1969 after unseating the Republican incumbent, Orval Hansen, in the 1968 primary election and has been there ever since.

His most harrowing election was in 1976 when charges of illegal campaign reporting and IRS tax filing violations sparked the campaign. He won by a skimpy 1,976 votes of about 167,000 cast over Democrat Stan Kress. Two years later, he handily defeated Kress.

Although on the surface Hansen appears unconcerned, voting records show that at least 42 percent of the voters oppose him, regardless of whom is the candidate. On the other hand about 45 percent are his dedicated followers who feel he can do no wrong. There is thus a thin margin of a crucial 13 percent swing vote among the independents.