

The Post-Register

The political pulse

C-8

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, May 19, 1982

The election eye

East Idaho becomes focal election point

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The influx of the top Republican candidates for contested state offices for the May 25 primary election indicates Bonneville County and east Idaho may again decide the winners in close races, just as in the past.

The top contenders concentrated on east Idaho over the weekend as the second most important area in the state, leaving the final week for the popular Boise area.

Idaho Falls casts the second largest Republican vote, next to the Boise, so hence is the combatants were here to seek the votes.

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The main attraction, of course, is the Republican gubernatorial fight between Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead.

Past election records show east Idaho has voted for staunch conservative candidates in the Republican primary, and to some extent, in the general election.

Batt spent considerable time with an open house Friday night at the State Sen. William L. Floyd Friday night and then joined his volunteers for a house-to-house campaign much of Saturday, distributing campaign literature.

Olmstead was here Monday for press interviews and for contacts with party supporters.

Both Batt and Olmstead plan to be here later in the week in their final bid for east Idaho primary votes.

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In these closing days, Olmstead has sought desperately to pin the moderate label on Batt and picture himself as the true conservative. He has had influential conservative legislators and past legislators, such as Vernon Ravenscroft of Boise; James Ellworth of Lemhi; and others endorse his candidacy. Whether this will help remains to be seen.

Ellworth, who served as senator 12 years 1965-77, the last eight as the president pro tem,

emphasized Olmstead's leadership and conservative advantages over Batt in a press conference here Thursday.

Eight east Idaho state representatives were said to endorse him.

Batt, who got off to an early start with early campaign contributions and organization, seeks to counter the Olmstead thrust by insisting he is basically conservative but also progressive. He said he has voted for essential appropriations for universities, highways, public schools and highways which Olmstead has not. Batt said these budgets were approved by the conservative Joint Finance Appropriation Committee.

Batt also says 33 present and past legislators have endorsed him, including all five of the east Idaho Republican senators presently serving.

Batt contends that he can compromise whereas Olmstead is much more rigid. He further says, with some justification, that of the two he would have a better chance of defeating Evans because he can get the independent and moderate vote whereas Olmstead can't.

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Most of the other Republican state races evoke little interest and most appear to be lopsided.

Also here were Attorney General David H. Leroy who shouldn't have any trouble winning the lieutenant governor nomination from Ron Hove, a Hayden Lake naturopath; Nolan Young, a former Idaho Falls CPA but now of Boise, who is paired in what could be an interesting battle with State Sen. Dean Van Engelen, Burley; and Jim Jones, Jerome attorney, who also is locked in what appears a tight contest with Ada County Prosecutor Jim Harris, Boise, for attorney general.

The only other state contest is on the Democratic side in which Richard Stallings, Ricks College instructor, who is spending most of his time in east Idaho. He should have little trouble winning the nomination over George Anthony, Buhl, for 2nd District congressman.