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The political pulse

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The election eye

Close state contests shape up for primary

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It's been a strenuous campaign for state candidates locked in contest for Tuesday's primary election but most political observers and informal polls indicate that Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt will win the Republican gubernatorial nomination Tuesday over House Speaker Ralph Olmstead.

They also feel a tight struggle may develop between Jerome attorney Jim Jones and Ada County Prosecutor Jim Harris for the Republican attorney general spot with a hesitant nod going to Jones. However, it would be no surprise for Harris to eke out a narrow victory.

Generally, Ricks College instructor Richard H. Stallings is favored to handily vanquish Buhl businessman George Anthony for the Democratic 2nd District nomination.

An advantage is also seen for State Sen. Dean Van Engelen, Burley, over Nolan G. Young, now of Boise but a former longtime Idaho Falls CPA, for the Republican state auditor nomination.

There's one other state contest, if it can be called that, but Attorney General David H. Leroy, is expected to take 90 percent of the votes for lieutenant governor.

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It would appear that Olmstead as the more conservative candidate would win the nomination but Batt has a better organization, and lined up early support and campaign money. Each will spend close to \$200,000 but Batt appears to have a definite advantage, according to most observers.

Batt expects decisive majorities in his home Boise area and even strong support in east and north Idaho, perhaps only trailing in Olmstead's home grounds in the Twin Falls area.

Olmstead feels he will gain majorities in east and north Idaho, hefty margins in his home base of the Twin Falls area and almost run even in the Boise area.

The key situation here is the necessity for Olmstead to win the conservative votes in east Idaho and the rural areas. It appears he will not, and thus a probable Batt victory.

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Both Jones and Harris have waged a strenuous attorney general campaign. Jones is reported to have spent close to \$90,000 while

Harris' pricetag is only about a third of that.

Jones expects to roll up majorities in the conservative regions of most of the state, particularly east Idaho, to offset admitted Harris margins in the Boise area.

Harris feels his topheavy margins in Boise and running about even or even better in most sections of the state, will bring him victory. He said he even expects to win Bonneville, and if he does, the triumph likely will go his way.

If Jones does not get a decided conservative majority outside of the Boise area then he could lose. There is little question he has mounted the most intensive campaign. His efforts in the 2nd District congressional primaries against George Hansen in 1980 and 1978 have given him wider exposure in south Idaho but it also alienated some Hansen supporters who may vote for Harris.

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The other three statewide races carry less interest but still furnish a sidelight.

Stallings appears to have been much better organized and is likely win the Democratic 2nd District congressional nomination handily over George Anthony in a comparatively small turnout.

Van Engelen, as a third-term state senator and the leading state budget slicer, likely has more exposure and is better acquainted with Republican leaders than is Young. This should give him the edge, although the interest in this contest is less than exciting.

Leroy should have little trouble against Ron Hoye, a Hayden Lake naturopath, whose news releases indicate him to be on the radical right.

Most are concerned over the probable light vote which means those candidates closest to the party leaders have an advantage. The dedicated party voters will cast ballots while most others stay away from the polls.

Voter apathy has been reported by most candidates seeking positions. The best guess would indicate only some 30 percent of the eligible voters will go to the polls. This is below the 40 percent cast in each of the last two primary elections. As has been the case in recent years, Republicans outvote Democrats 3-1 because of more exciting Republican contests and normally Republican majorities in most sections of the state.