

# Eastern Idaho Demos bypassed chance

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register columnist

Eastern Idaho Democrats in general and particularly those in Bonneville County failed to capitalize on winning a place on November's general election ballot.

They did not take advantage of situations where three more seats were offered under the new legislative reapportionment plan; four Republican incumbents voluntarily gave up their posts, and two others are replacements who have not been tested in elections.

It was a rare opportunity that eager Democratic candidates may not be offered again for a long time.

Of the 18 legislators in the 10 eastern Idaho counties now, only two are Democrats: House Minority Leader Melvin Hammond, Rexburg, and Sen. Jerry Wellard, Blackfoot.

Hammond has yielded his seat to become president of the LDS Church's Bolivian Mission. Wellard was appointed last winter to replace Sen. Israel Merrill, Blackfoot, who was appointed to the Idaho Racing Commission.

All three Idaho Falls Republican incumbents in Legislative District 29, made up of west Bonneville and Butte County, decided to step aside. They are Sen. J. Marsden Williams, who has served nine terms, Rep. Kurt L. Johnson, who also served nine two-year terms, and Rep. Martin B. Trillhaase, who just finished two terms.

Also giving up his seat is Rep. D. Cornell Thomas, Pingree, who

served two terms in District 27, made up mostly of Bingham County.

Under the new reapportionment plan, eastern Idaho got a new district, known as floterial District 33, made up of nine eastern Idaho counties.

Two Republicans were appointed to fill vacancies last year, Sen. Ann Rydalch and Rep. Preston Brimhall, but they have yet to test their constituents' voting sentiments.

John Ohman, Idaho Falls attorney, Bonneville County Democrat state committeeman and a veteran Idaho political leader, blames the situation on apathy on the part of both Democrat and Republican candidates, but particularly the former.

"It appears Democrats are resigned to the fact this area is a Republican stronghold," he said. "Also many of the possibly strong Democrat candidates have lost interest this year."

"The Bonneville Democrat Central Committee does not have much financing, but we could have helped a little."

Ohman said Bonneville Democratic party leaders were not successful in getting strong candidates to seek positions.

Pressure was exerted particularly on such well-known figures as John Combo, an attorney, and Bill Storer, Iona mayor, who both ran close Senate races against entrenched Republican incumbents in 1982; and Wendell Miller, a former long-time state representative. Combo and Storer, who each lost by less than 1,000

votes two years ago, said they did not want to spend their time and money to run in the new reapportionment district made up of all of Bonneville and Teton counties.

Formerly, they competed in the eastern third of Bonneville and all of Teton. Miller said he also has lost interest, at least for this year. They also said they were less interested in competing in the nine-county floterial district.

There is, however, some intense interest among the Democrats in two other outlying legislative districts.

In District 31 made up of Madison and Fremont Counties, four strong Democrats vied for Seat A to replace Hammond.

In a close race, Tom Kershaw, Sugar-Salem school superintendent, won by 13 votes over Keith Larsen, Rexburg businessman. Close behind were Darrell Moss, Sugar City councilman, and Roger J. Hoopes, Rexburg attorney.

In District 30 encompassing Jefferson, Butte, Lemhi, Custer and Clark counties, James Herndon, well-known Salmon attorney is a formidable competitor against Rep. Ray E. Infanger, also of Salmon. Herndon is the son of Charles Herndon, who was the favored Democrat nominee for governor in 1966, but was killed in a plane crash before the general election.

Also appearing as a strong aspirant is Merrill J. Rose, St. Anthony mayor. He may seek a representative seat in the new floterial district 33 of the nine counties. He won the right

to do this through a write-in campaign, but is also the party nominee in District 31 in Madison and Teton counties. He has not decided which seat he will seek; it will depend on how much financial support he is able to drum up.

Republicans filled their tickets for all legislative positions but the Democrats left vacancies for three Senate seats and three state representative positions.

Those unopposed for the general election except for the remote possibility of write-ins are Sens. Mark G. Ricks, Rexburg, and Vearl Crystal, Rigby, and a newcomer, Mike Crapo, Idaho Falls, for the Senate; and Reps. John O. Sessions, Driggs; JoAn E. Wood, Rigby, and Reed Hansen, Idaho Falls, all in District 32, for the House.

Among the Democrat neophytes looking strong is Ron Hampton, who will challenge Mrs. Rydalch for Seat C in District 32. Hampton and his wife were active in eastern Idaho in behalf of former Sen. Frank Church during his last two campaigns.

Most of the Democrats entered in the race for eastern Idaho legislative seats are comparative newcomers. It dims Democrats' chances of winning Senate control or appreciably closing the wide gap in the House. Republicans control the Senate 21-14 and the House 51-19.

Yet if these newcomers wage intensive campaigns and appeal to voters they could spring upsets here and there. But their chances at present look faint.