

Hansen's chance in general election a tricky question

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One of the most intriguing questions of the 1984 general election is whether controversial Idaho congressman George V. Hansen will be re-elected.

The maverick lawmaker has an unorthodox style that appears to engender fireworks when he tackles emotional issues. Hansen is in deep trouble as a result of convictions on four felony counts of failure to file complete financial disclosure statements.

His campaign is in the throes of a fervid pitch that could cloud predictions for the upcoming election.

An analysis would indicate that Hansen will have little trouble winning the Republican primary election against Jerome attorney Dan Adamson. Depending on how the campaign goes after the primary, Hansen could face defeat in the November general elections in a rematch against Democrat Richard Stallings, Ricks College professor.

This writer has always predicted Hansen victories in the past when most political commentators did not.

In recent interviews, Hansen answered two vital questions.

- In his opinion, which is probably correct, records indicate he will not have to serve time in prison, but may be given fines. That would permit him to continue serving in Congress.

- He believes he will be re-elected because he feels he has converted new friends to his cause. He said he will be helped by an expected strong Reagan and Republican tide in Idaho this year. This is in contrast with 1982 when the right-to-work issue coaxed out a strong labor vote.

In an interview with this writer, Adamson says he sincerely believes that there has been enough erosion among Republican voters to give him a primary triumph. He said Hansen "trounced" Jim Jones, now state attorney general, by less than 6 percent of the vote in 1978.

What may hurt Hansen more than his convictions are his staggering debts and his penchant for becoming embroiled in emotional issues. The pamphlet picturing him as a dragon slayer up against federal agencies has dubious value among swing voters.

It was revealed during the trial that he owes at least a third of a million dollars in debt, a figure that could be considerably higher.

Also at issue are his self-engendered safaris to Iran and Central America.

On the plus side, most voters like his conservative voting record, his consistent opposition to what they believe is excessive government spending (regardless of his own personal finances), his warm hand-shaking style, and his willingness to fight for the underdog and against federal agencies.

Election records indicate Adamson is a long shot at the best in the primary.

Jones said he spent \$130,000 in 1978 and \$85,000 in 1980 against Hansen. Hansen by contrast spent \$30,000 in 1978, but \$90,000 in 1980.

Hansen won 55.7 percent to 44.3 percent of the vote in 1978, but did better two years later, marking up a 57.4 to 42.6 percentage edge.

When Hansen was reported to be involved with filing false financial reports in 1974, Democrat nominee Stan Kress, Firth school superintendent, lost by only 1,976 votes. Two years later, Kress was soundly vanquished, 58-42 percent. Hansen cites this and the Jones contests to show he does better in a rematch.

Stallings was defeated by Hansen in 1982 by a margin of 83,876 to 76,608, or 7,265 votes, a 1 percent margin.

Hansen's favorite campaign tactics include alleging the federal court charges are a witch hunt and are in retaliation to his warfare against IRS, OSHA, INS and other federal agencies.

He usually ignores his opponents and seldom faces them in debate. He has said he will not debate Adamson, just as he has never argued face-to-face against Stallings. He says opponents seek to embarrass him because of his personal financial troubles.

Hansen's hard right-wing supporters are concentrated among the Republicans. However, the vast majority will continue to strongly support him in the primary, regardless of his court fate, even if he should be sent to prison.

Election records indicate about 42-46 percent of the voters will solidly back Hansen, and another 40-42 percent will always vote against him. That leaves a swing vote of between 5 and 15 percent.

It is the independent and moderate voters who will decide his fate. Right now, they appear to be leaning away from him. It will be Hansen's task to sway them toward his camp by the time the general election rolls around. The situation may become clearer by the cold fall days in late October.