

This I.F. election may be first time all run unopposed

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The lack of opposition to the incumbents in Tuesday's Idaho Falls municipal election attests to the high level of confidence most city voters have in the present administration.

Going back into records dating to the incorporation of Idaho Falls in 1900, this is believed to be the first slate of candidates to all run unopposed.

It speaks highly for Mayor Thomas Campbell and the three incumbent councilmen, Melvin Erickson, Ralph Wood and Paul Hovey. The mayor has served the third longest of any mayor, with eight years. On the council, Erickson has served 20 years, Hovey 16 and Wood 12.

Although most people feel there should be opposition to give voters a choice, it must be admitted that any challenger would have little chance of winning.

Nominating petitions were issued to unidentified challengers to each of the incumbents, but they did not file those petitions.

The mayor and city councilmen say they have kept taxes and the cost of city services the lowest of any of Idaho's cities.

The mayor cites the fact that the city is functioning on a cash basis and has enough money on hand to pay in advance for half of this fiscal year. He said that in another year the city will have enough cash on hand to pay in advance for the next year, which apparently would make it the only city in the state in that position. The city has a budget of about \$47 million.

The mayor has said property tax supplies only 11 percent of the city's budget. About half of the city's income, of course, is furnished by the city electrical department, with the other income emanating from water, sewer and garbage services.

The lack of opposition may harm another proposal on the city ballot — the \$1.65 million indoor swimming pool. Also up for an advisory vote is the location of the pool.

It follows that without opposition to the candidates there may be a light vote. The pool bond needs a two-thirds majority, and this may be difficult to garner under the circumstances.

If there is an unusually light vote, the swimming pool proposal may be defeated, because the opposition — made up of older persons and those objecting to higher taxes — may turn out in large numbers. If there is a moderate or heavy vote, the proposal could win.

Records show that 4,551, or only 23.3 percent of the registered 19,495 voters, turned out in the last city election in 1983. In that instance, there was only token opposition to the three incumbents, Sam Sakaguchi, Art Chandler and Wesley Deist, who each won by about 3-1 margins.

Election Registrar Ellen Bingham said 20,113 are registered, slightly over the 19,495 of two years ago. She

said absentee balloting has been slow, with only about 60 issued so far. This compares with 161 in 1983.

It would appear that a vote turnout of over 4,000 would be needed for the pool proposal to pass. However, there has been no strong organized opposition to the proposal.

The pool proposal attracted a 64 percent majority in 1981, just short of the 66.7 percent margin needed for passage.

"If there is a light vote it (pool proposal) might go down to defeat," warned the mayor.

As far as location is concerned, there is little doubt that the location at Boulevard at Seventh Street, location of the old Idaho Falls High School, will win overwhelming approval.

The other two locations are near Skyline High School at the southwestern outskirts and the other at Freeman Park on the northwestern fringe.

The preponderance of the city population resides east of the railroad tracks, and the majority will vote for the Boulevard location while the westside inhabitants, who are in minority, will be further split by voting on two locations in their areas.

Some residents who oppose the Boulevard location say it would reduce the value of homes near the site. Yet, the old Idaho Falls High School (which later became the Central Junior High School) was located at that site, which certainly brought more traffic congestion than an indoor swimming pool would. The school was destroyed by fire several years ago.

The Boulevard swimming pool site provides for 240 off-street parking spaces.

City pool committee members said that based on an average \$60,000 home, the swimming pool cost would be none the first year, 95 cents per month for the second year and 65 cents monthly for each subsequent year until the bonds are retired in 15 years.

It is heartening to see considerable contests in other cities of east Idaho, and there should be some interesting races. The candidates must be commended and even admired because the financial future most cities face is indeed bleak.

Cities are strapped by restrictions of the 1 Percent Initiative, falling city revenue and the prospect that federal revenue sharing funds will be drastically cut in the future and perhaps eventually eliminated.

That's not to mention the difficulty of getting liability insurance, the lack of which may hold mayors and city council members personally liable.

Special elections include a \$240,000 water and sewer revenue bond in Driggs, a \$160,000 water, a term revenue bond in Victor, a \$550,000 water and sewer revenue bond in rural Bingham County, a \$1 million levy override in North Fremont Hospital District.