The election eye . . .

The state convention system — it's now dull

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

The main purpose of the state political conventions appears to be opportunity for party faithfuls to get together from all over the state and renew acquaintainces and rejuvenate enthusiasm for the general election campaign.

Yes, it's true, they adopt a party platform and resolutions that are supposed to outline party philosophies and goals, but individual candidates are at liberty to run on their own and are free to reject any part of the platform they don't like. They often do.

There was time a few years ago when state conventions were all-important. That was when delegates were selected for presidential contenders and there was the intrigue of the so-called smoke-filled rooms to hassle over such selections.

There were kingmakers in such proceedings and the state chairman was indeed a powerful political figure. Such powerful personalities as the late Lloyd Adams, Rexburg attorney, wielded considerable influence. He was a Republican but he also was equally a power with Democrats. Tom Boise, Lewiston, was the Democratic power in the 40s and 50s.

* * *

The days of the old political conventions are gone, perhaps forever. Yes, they still have a good social time, argue over the platform and resolutions with a vigor as if the nation's future depended on what they did, but the power of the political bosses has dwindled.

Those who favored a presidential primary for Idaho believe presidential candidates would swarm into the state. This did not prove to be the case. The only one who came was John Anderson, Republican turned independent. It was rumored Sen. Ted Kennedy would make a last-minute trip to the state Democratic Convention at Pocatello but this possibility evaporated when he was not invited to the mayor's convention at Seattle. President Carter and Ronald Reagan ignored Idaho because they had the field pretty well to themselves.

There was some scrapping for the four uncommitted delegates at the convention 10 days ago, but that was rather meager pickings.

The Post-Register
The political pulse

Wednesday, June 25, 1980

Republicans don't even have that alternative, since Reagan is the lone contender. True, Anderson gleaned two of 21 delegates, but his desertion of the Republican Party means those in all probability will go to Reagan.

* * *

Perhaps if the old convention system was in vogue, Kennedy and not President Carter would have got most of the convention votes. There is little question that Reagan would have been the Republican choice, convention or not. Reagan's Idaho vote is consistently the largest percentagewise of any state.

In the old convention days, the delegates were wooed by the candidates. Thus both Carter and Kennedy might have come to Pocatello. Reagan, not taking any chances, might even have gone to Boise the coming weekend.

The Idaho Republicans usually picked the wrong candidate, such as favoring Thomas E. Dewey in 1940, and 1944, and Robert Taft in 1952. They did support President Eisenhower and Richard Nixon because they were presidents and there were no other challengers. They also bet on the wrong horse four years ago in backing Reagan, but President Ford was the nominee and was defeated by Jimmy Carter.

The Idaho Democrats have done better in picking winners, such as Sen. George McGovern and Humbert Humprey in winning their party nominations; Lyndon B. Johnson, John Kennedy and Harry Truman. Sen. Frank Church was the favorite son four years ago but the majority of delegates eventually swerved to Carter at the national convention time.

* * *

The Democrats had voluminous resolutions and a platform but they didn't even mention proposals for changes in the primary system of elections or conventions. Whether the Republicans do remains to be seen this weekend.

However, the system of primary presidential elections appears to have been well entrenched with nearly all states holding them. It would appear hard for Idaho to reverse such a nationwide trend, at least for the time being.

How the state conventions perform will determine somewhat whether legislators may want changes. The majority of Republicans likely have no cause for complaint, since Reagan was the overwhelming favorite, anyway, convention or election. The Democrats bungled with their statewide caucuses where their selection did not follow the voters choice and left Democratic voters less than happy. That likely will give Kennedy 9 votes to Carter's 8, but 62 percent of the Demoratic voters favored Carter to only 22 percent for Kennedy in the May 27 Idaho primary election.