The election eye...

Democrats may gain seats in East Idaho

The Post-Register
The political pulse

B-10 Idaho Falls, Idaho, Sunday, May 4, 1980

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Looking at the results of late filings, it now appears Democrats may be able to narrow the overwhelming Republican majority in the East Idaho legislative delegation.

There appeared to be little chance for this by the Democrats at first and it reached a point where there was question as to whether they could hold their pitiful four seats, compared with 14 for the Republicans.

The only Democrats from the 10 East Idaho counties are Sens. Israel Merrill, Blackfoot, and Richard A. Egbert, Tetonia; and Reps. Melvin Hammond, Rexburg, and C. Wendell Miller, Idaho Falls.

East Idaho Republicans reflect the heavy majority existing in the Idaho Legislature with Sens. J. Marsden Williams and Dane Watkins, Idaho Falls; Vearl Crystal, Rigby, and Mark Ricks, Rexburg; and Reps. Darwin Young and Raymond Parks, Blackfoot; Kurt L. Johnson, Elaine Kearnes, Gary L.Paxman and Linden B. Bateman, Idaho Falls; John O. Sessions, Driggs; Wayne E. Tibbitts, Lorenzo; Ray E. Infanger, Salmon, and Doyle C. Miner, St. Anthony.

The Republicans hold a margin of 19-16 in the Senate and 50-20 in the House.

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Holding the enviable record of running unopposed for both primary and general elections, except for the remote possibility of write-ins are Democrat Reps. Hammond and Miller and Republican Sens. Crystal and Ricks, and Reps. Young, Johnson, Mrs.Kearnes, Bateman, and Sessions.

Most of the others face what can be considered stiff opposition, although this will depend on the type of campaigns challengers wage.

The Democrats best chances of picking up seats are in District 29 where the popular and well known Don Aupperle, who served as Idaho Falls School District 91 vocal director for 37 years, opposes the ultra-conservative Paxman; in District 28 where the highly respected John L. Clarke, Ricks College president for 27 years and outstanding church leader, seeks the seat being vacated by Miner and in District 20 where Tom Harrington, Rigby High School teacher, opposes Infanger.

The prospects are less bright but still possible in District 29 where Democrats Cyril Slansky, retired Idaho Falls scientist, challenges Watkins and in District 27 where Michael King, Snake River High School teacher, challenges Parks.

Willims faces a rematch with Charles Amberson, retired Idaho Falls scientist, in what could be a brisk race. Williams won this contest two years ago with about 5,000 votes to Amberson's 2,000 and it's dubious, but possible, for Amberson to erase this margin.

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On the other hand the two Democratic state senators also face tough contests and are by no means assured of a free tickets to the Legislature. Merrill is opposed by Dean Jones, president of the Blackfoot Chamber of Commerce and a realtor and a former radio station owner. Egbert, who always faces tough fights, may have an easier time this year but it's no cinch. Two Republicans, Don Penfold, Darby farmer, and William Floyd, Idaho Falls building developer and realtor, are paired in a primary fight to determine who will oppose him.

A rather unusual situation is the unopposed status of the two lone Democrats, Hammond and Miller, attesting to their popularity.

There are only three primary legislative races which furnish some interest. Besides the one between Penfold and Floyd, Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, is challenged by young Jerry Van Leuven, Roberts farmer, in District 20 and Rich Orme, St.Anthony farmer, and Dan S.Hess, retired Ricks College professor, are paired in a Republican race in District 28.

How they campaign will determine the winner, but it would appear at this time that Tibbitts hold a definite edge over Van Leuven and Orme a slight edge over Hess, while the Penfold-Floyd contest could be rated a tossup at this time.

The presidential primary and the bitter Second District congressional battle between Rep.George V. Hansen and Jim Jones should coax out a larger number of voters than usual, plus the few county races. The turnout may be unusually high for a primary and it comes in May rather than the dull vacation month of August.