

Results

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Congressional comments . . .

Idaho congressional delegates in key spots

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Idaho Republican contestants scored smashing victories in the 1980 general election, but with their triumph comes the responsibilities and test of being able to produce.

The presidency and Senate shifted from Democratic to Republican control, and although the House remains in Democratic majority, Republicans narrowed the margin to only 27 seats from 56 in the previous administration.

The most significant victory was scored by Republican Steve Symms, a former congressman who ousted Democratic Sen. Frank Church, by a margin of less than 4,000 votes. Republican Congressman George V. Hansen had little trouble for re-election in the 2nd District, and Larry Craig, a former state senator, replaced Symms in the 1st District. Sen. James A. McClure, of course, is a holdover until 1984.

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The Republicans now find they must shift from the defensive to the offensive, a role they often find difficult to adjust to. They find themselves, for example, forced to vote for raising the debt limit. In the past, congressional Republicans, with the Idahoans in the forefront, have made raising the debt limit a symbol for high government spending. The shoe is now on the other foot and the Democrats are using the same tactics.

A Senate vote just this week raising the debt limit above a trillion passed 64-34 with only six Republicans opposing. One of these was Symms, but McClure, who has been critical of raising the debt, joined 45 other Republicans and 18 Democrats in favor. Six Republicans and 28 Democrats voted in opposition.

The Idaho Republican delegation had found it comfortable to vote for lower spending, but if the knife cuts too deep it also has a double edge. For example, in the proposed 1981 Farm Bill, they slashed subsidies, especially on milk, but also reduced federal help for wheat and feed grains. Perhaps this could be acceptable, but the Reagan backers, in a blatant political deal, then voted generous subsidies for tobacco and sugar to wean the votes of some southern Democratic congressmen to pass the Reagan economic package. It will be a step that doesn't sit well with most Idaho farmers and dairymen.

The same situation may apply to many other phases of federal appropriations. These include deep slices in federal block grants to

range of agriculture, and many, many others. Many of these cuts are what people want but not to the point that they bring hardship and suffering.

McClure, Symms and Hansen are fond of saying this is part of the policy returning government to the people. But it also means transferring the pricetag loads from federal to state, county, and school governments. The key question then, is how far should government be reduced? In any event, it is the hapless taxpayer who is at the bottom and must pay, regardless of whether federal, state or local governments do the billing.

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All four members of the Idaho congressional delegation are in key positions to help boost the Reagan programs. McClure, of course, is one of the most powerful as Republican Conference Committee, or caucus, chairman, the third highest in Senate leadership. He is also chairman of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and a member of the powerful Appropriations Committee and of the Rules and Administration Committee.

Symms is member of the important Finance Committee and also is assigned to the Budget, Environment and Public Works and the Joint Economic committees.

Hansen is a member of the Agriculture Committee and Banking, Finance and Urban Affairs, while Craig is assigned to Education and Labor, Interior and Insular Affairs, and Select Committee on Aging.

Hansen commented following Reagan's latest nationwide television talk that all four members "are in the mainstream" to help implement Reagan's program, and indeed they are.

Democratic Sen. Frank Church, without doubt, was one of the most effective senators in pushing for Idaho-oriented legislation, often in opposition to the president. This was frequently the case in the nuclear field, where President Carter was less than an enthusiastic backer of nuclear development.

McClure, for example, introduced one of the finest bills last week in what he calls the National Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1981 to settle the vexing question of disposal of radioactive wastes.

It now remains to be seen how successful the Republican delegation performs in enacting these laws. Their report cards will be studied for their 1982, 1984 and even 1986 elections.