The Post-Register

The political pulse

The city scene . . .

Incumbents hold top rankings for election

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

The incumbents in Tuesday's city election must be considered strong favorites for re-election, although the two courageous challengers can be expected to get a hefty number of opposition votes.

Mayor Thomas V. Campbell is unopposed while the three incumbent councilmen, Melvin L.Erickson, Ralph M.Wood and Paul L. Hovey face contests from two newcomers, Jan Brown and William C. Lattin, both EG&G employees.

One of the bright spots is the fact there has been a heavy registration of 21,591, only 39 short of the alltime record of the 22,630 registered for the city's last bond election.

This election offers fewer contests than any in at least 15 years, indicating to political observers the vote turnout may reach only about a third of the registered voters, probably between 7,000 and 8,000. This compares with the alltime record of 11,218 in 1977 when Campbell was first elected mayor in a brisk race, and to 7,861 in 1979 when a record field of 14 vied for the three councilmen seats but no mayoralty contest.

* * *

It would appear that this late in the campaign there is no organized last-minute writein campaign, although it can be expected some voters opposing the administration will write in other names, such as Bob Bybee, Pat Brown and Gary Paxman, who had been mentioned earlier as possible mayoralty contenders.

Thus Campbell will be the first mayor in history of the city without any organized opposition, write-ins or otherwise. Mayor S. Eddie Pedersen had no candidate file against him in 1965 and 1969 but there were two write-ins, although they offered no serious oppostion, and received only after 1,000 votes each.

This lack of competition must be interpreted to mean the citizenry is satisfied with the way the present administration has been conducting its affairs. The past forums have failed to uncover any major issue against the the city, particularly on the all important finances.

The two challengers have emphasized what they call the administration's lack of open mindedness and response to city needs.

The mayor and council incuments point out, however, there are more than 30 citizen committees functioning, that all city meetings have been well publicized in advance and the City Hall doors are always open to anyone with complaints.

Miss Brown's statement at the Greater Idaho Falls Chamber of Commerce candidate forum Tuesday that the Sunday sale of beer and wine would not see a big increase in disturbance, indicating approval, could harm her politically.

* * *

All of the council incumbents, Erickson, Wood and Hovey, say they have been campaigning intensively. They and their supporters have been making a house-to-house canvass distributing their literature, most of them have engaged in telephone calls to voters, and a number have installed yard signs. They all have newspaper and radio advertising to varying degrees.

Wood appears to have the most extensive campaign with 500 yard signs, a full-fledged telephone bank and an intensive citywide canvass.

Miss Brown appears the most active of the challengers with some 150 yard signs, a full corps of dedicated backers making house-to-house calls, and an extensive advertising campaign.

Lattin said he has about 20 yard signs but explained he has a low budget which preclude him from making an extensive campaign.

All of the candidates say they have received excellent responses to their campaigning.

* * *

In other larger cities of east Idaho, incumbent mayors are challenged in Blackfoot, Rexburg, Rigby, Roberts and Stanley, and there also are mayoralty fights at St. Anthony and Aberdeen.

Most of the smaller cities are electing councilmean only and in most cases there are brisk contests on tap. It would appear these elections are largely based on personal popularity.

There are two special elections, one at Rexburg for a $98,700 overrride tax proposal and another at Firth for a renewed 10-year plant facility operation funds.

* * *

On basis of past election records, it would appear there are less than 2,000 actually opposed to the present city administration, less than 10 percent of the registered voters.

There also have been mild surprises in the past with some candidates running stronger or weaker than expected, and this could easily happen this time.

Miss Brown, for example, could squeeze into the winner's circle as she will receive much of the administration's opposition votes. One of the three incumbents also could run well ahead of the pack.

It seems Campbell will receive a resounding vote with only a scattering of write-in votes against him, unless there should be a last minute write-in but this is now too late to be effective.

Most observers feel that Erickson, Wood and Hovey will finish rather close in about that order for re-election, with Miss Brown a fair fourth, but out of the money, and Lattin trailing.