

The election eye . . .

As expected, polls reversed for Carter

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

It should not surprise voters that President Carter is showing such tremendous strength in the latest polls, although the Iranian situation likely hastened the process.

This writer, nearly a year ago when Carter was barely drawing enough straw votes to be considered a formidable candidate for re-election, forecast that as the election time rolled around, polls would be doing a backflip.

This has taken place even earlier and more pronounced than expected, and this could work to Carter's disadvantage later.

As political followers recall, Carter was getting about the lowest mark a sitting president could get in the polls, ranking far below Sen. Ted Kennedy, Ronald Reagan and others, during most of the spring, summer and early fall.

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As late as last October, a 67-26 percent majority of all Democratic and independent voters did not think President Carter could win his party's nomination again, on basis of the Louis Harris-ABC poll. In November, the figure had narrowed to 50-34 percent.

The same poll conducted the past week now gives Carter a commanding 58-38 percent lead among Democratic voters over Kennedy. This is almost a reversal of three months ago, when Kennedy held a 2-1 lead, and was ahead 55-36 percent in mid-November.

It is also recalled that in July, Carter trailed the leading Republican contender, Ronald Reagan, 51-44 percent, but since then Carter has forged well in the lead, holding at the latest poll a 54-42 percent advantage, and continuing to widen the margin.

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Last June, when the Western Governors gathered for their annual convention at Sun Valley, this writer wrote that even though Carter's poll rankings were the lowest ever for an incumbent president, President Carter was looked on by most of the Western governors, veteran newsmen and other observers as an odds-on favorite for re-election.

This appeared a rash statement to make at that time and it drew some good-natured joshing. It doesn't appear ridiculous anymore.

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Most didn't believe that Kennedy would run against Carter but they also didn't believe that Reagan or other Republican contenders could topple the president.

It was wrong to believe that Kennedy would not run, and perhaps he was reading the polls at that same time. Maybe now, he wishes he had waited a mite longer, considering how the polls are running increasingly strong against him.

It's to Gov. John V. Evans' credit and most of the Western governors that they solidly backed Carter at a time he needed their support. Evans is now Carter's state chairman and stands high on his list, a situation that should help him in the remainder of his term as governor.

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The election is still more than 10 months away and the present trend could change against Carter and in favor of Kennedy and the Republican contenders.

Historically since Herbert Hoover in 1932, an elective president has won when he sought re-election. (Gerald Ford, who lost in 1976, became a president by appointment, not election).

The president has tremendous powers at his disposal by virtue of his office. Carter has shown he can and does use them.

Foreign crises appear to have helped presidents, if they acted properly. An exception was President Lyndon B. Johnson, whose mania for forcing the

unpopular Vietnam War influenced him not to seek re-election.

As the foreign situation in the Middle East and Central Asia worsens, Carter will be tested.

If he fails, then the present

favorable polls could reverse themselves just as rapidly against him as they did for him in the last three months.

In other words, value polls for the present situation, not what they may be in the future.