The election eye...

Eastern Idaho focal point in Senate vote

The Post-Register
The political pulse
Idaho Falls, Idaho, Sunday, October 5, 1980 A-13

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

Bonneville County and East Idaho appear to be a focal point in the bristling senatorial struggle between Democrat U.S. Sen. Frank Church and Republican Congressman Steve Symms as the campaign enters the crucial homestretch.

This is witnessed by two of the best known U.S. senators in the nation coming to Idaho Falls to lend their hand. Sen. Henry Jackson, D-Washington, is scheduled here Saturday to help Church while Sen. Howard Baker, R-Tenn., is due Tuesday night to boost for Symms.

Both Jackson and Baker carry imposing credentials but whether their appearances will help Church or Symms is questionable. In the past, national figures coming to Idaho have had little impact on Idaho's favorite sons.

In such a tight senatorial race, however, every little bit helps.

Jackson, from neighboring Washington State, is the powerful chairman of the U.S.Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee which has the dominant voice on all energy matters, including nuclear power.

Baker is the Senate minority leader and is considered one of the top Republican moderates in the nation.

Both Jackson and Baker have been presidential candidates, Jackson in both 1972 and in 1976, and Baker this year.

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Jackson is expected to stress the nuclear power development which is of intense interest to East Idahoans and Church. Baker likely will coax the moderates to support Symms.

Senator Church must be commended for warmly backing nuclear power, despite intensive pressure against him from many other sections of the state. To his credit he has never wavered and continues to be the leading and most powerful voice in the Senate for this essential form of energy.

This also can be said for the other three members of Idaho's congressional delegation.

Baker could be of immense value in seeking to convince the vaccilating moderate Republicans to support Symms, many who now are less than enthusiastic for him. It will be interesting to see how he does this because Baker and Symms are at the extreme ends of political philosophies.

Nothing has been heard further whether Ronald Reagan will make the trip to Idaho, presumably in Idaho Falls, after abruptly cancelling his Sept. 29 appearance in deference for remake of a television campaign commercial.

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This writer never did think the Anybody But Church Committee based in Boise was very effective, and, in fact, was detrimental to Church's opponent with the low type of campaign it wages. This is substantiated, in part, by Symms last week finally rejecting ABC's last tirade against Church. At that time, Don Todd, ABC's director, said Church "voted his pocketbook" by favoring loan guarantees to New York City at a time when Church held New York City bonds in trust. Actually, this is a distortion because Church supported President Ford's law in 1975 which required the loans to be paid but not that of President Carter's proposal in 1978, which would have stuck the taxpayers in case of a New York City default.

Church said Symms sudden concern over the ABC tactics comes much too late, that the campaign waged against him the past year has harmed him, a statement that must be questioned.

The ABC was considerably weakened when it came under the aegis of the National Conservative Political Action Committee based in Virginia. Church contends with justification Symms has a long-standing connection with NCPAC and received thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from it in previous years.

The Symms disavowal of ABC tactics, however, indicates Symms repudiation of the organization and could mean its deathknell as a political force in this campaign. It's apparent Symms believed ABC was harming rather than helping him.

Todd vows to key in on Bonneville County, considered a key swing county in the campaign. It will be interesting to see what magnitude and direction it takes, if any.

As of now, Church appears to carry a precarious lead, andunless some unforeseen factor develops, he could maintain it at election day.