The election eye...

Reagan efforts seen as move to boost Symms

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The efforts to get Gov. Ronald Reagan to come to Idaho Falls is seen as an overt move to help Republican U.S. Rep. Steve Symms in his bitter senatorial battle with Democrat U.S. Sen. Frank Church.

Reagan was scheduled to come Sept. 29 but this has been indefinitely delayed. However, Idaho Republican Chairman Dennis M. Olsen said he is confident that Reagan will stop over in Idaho Falls during the campaign leading to the Nov. 4 general election.

At this stage of the game when the race appears tight, every little bit will help.

Apparently it was this plea that prompted Reagan to probably come to Idaho. After the convention he had told Olsen he would not come because of the urgent need to concentrate in the large populated swing states that could well decide his fate.

Yet, it must be realized that without a gain of Republican senators and congressmen, Reagan could do little in a legislative way even if he were to win the presidency.

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Reagan is unusually popular in Idaho as witnessed by past election results but whether this will rub off on Symms is a matter of conjecture. Reagan soundly trounced President Ford in the May, 1976, presidential primary in Idaho but lost the nomination to Ford in the national convention later that year at Kansas City.

Reagan isn't exactly a stranger to Idaho, but in fact considers the Gem State one of his favorite places.

Reagan was in Idaho Falls May 12, 1976, while campaigning for the presidency. He won the primary election handily and he won most of the Idaho delegates at the convention.

It is recalled he landed at the airport, granted an exclusive interview to this writer while riding from the airport to the Civic Auditorium so that the story would appear in that day's edition. Reagan then delivered a major talk here on his policies. At that time, Dennis M. Olsen, now the state party chairman, was his campaign manager here.

Almost forgotten, Reagan came to Idaho Falls in 1963 before he entered the political arena as a promoter and salesman for General Electric. That was the time when the company held the prime operating contract for the old Aircraft Propulsion Plant at the old National Reactor Testing Station, now known as Idaho National Engineering Laboratory.

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Records indicate that appearances of national figures don't particularly help a local candidate, and sometimes they are harmful. In Reagan's case it might be different because Reagan is highly popular in Idaho. It would be no surprise if Idaho gives him the largest majority percentage over Carter in the Nov. 4 election.

The Reagan name heading the top of the Republican ballot thus could boost Symms to some extent, and any help in such a race, could be a decisive factor.

Idahoans are known for their independent voting, even though many consider Idaho a conservative Republican state. Yet, these same voters elect such ultra conservatives as Sen. James McClure and Congressmen George Hansen and Symms, as contrasted with the more liberal officer holders as Church, Gov. John V. Evans, and before him, Cecil D. Andrus.

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It's also significant that Reagan's appearance is scheduled for Idaho Falls because East Idaho, particularly Bonneville County, could very well decide the election. Symms must win East Idaho if he is to oust Church and no one knows that better than himself.

It's not that Bonneville County has that many voters in the election but it's an unerring barometer as based on past elections that if a Democrat can win Bonneville County he is almost certain to win the state. Conversely, if a Republican can't capture the county it means he won't win the state in a fairly close election.

Such Democrats as Church have always captured Bonneville, and so have Andrus, Auditor Joe Williams and Treasurer Marjorie Ruth Moon, for example.

In most cases where the factors are almost even, the Republican will generally win Bonneville, and it follows, will capture the state.

Thus, the Reagan appearances is not so much important in capturing Idaho—this appears a foregone conclusion—but just how much can he help Symms.