

Phil Batt weighs political future

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One of the state's leading Republican figures keeps a low profile these days but there is a feeling in political circles he will be heard from again.

It is Philip E. Batt, the former lieutenant governor and state senator, who lost last year to Gov. John Evans by only 4,208 votes.

"I wouldn't totally rule out anything and I'm keeping my options open," he said in reply as to whether he might run again for the governorship or any other high public office.

"I'll wait a year or two and then take a look," he said.

Now 56, he says he would be near 60 if he ran again, but then points out Reagan is nearly 71 and contemplates another four-year term.

"Maybe age is not that important," he said.

He did say he is not interested in Washington, ruling out any possible contest for Congress, nor does he want to go back to the Legislature where he served 12 years, the last terms as the Senate majority leader. He filled a four-year term as lieutenant governor before taking on the governor in the closest Idaho gubernatorial contest in history.

As such, his political experience is impressive and just about matches what Evans did before stepping into the state's highest elected office.

"I like private life," Batt said in a Post-Register telephone interview. "It feels good to not having to go to some meeting about every night and to having time for myself. I can now spend more time with my family, I like to play golf even though I'm not much good at it. Most of all, I like to look after my farm."

His farm is 800 acres five miles southwest of Wilder near the Oregon border, all irrigated. He grows onions, beets, wheat and potatoes and even some grapes.

He said his crops all look good, although a little late, but the market is now weak.

He farm is in what is known as Central Cove, only five miles from Sen. Steve Symms vineyard holdings in Canyon County.

Turning to the past gubernatorial race, he said he felt Evans' incumbency was probably the main reason he was beaten.

He said he might have been more aggressive but that overall he felt he ran a good campaign and probably got the maximum results. He campaign cost \$465,779 but he finished in the black. He said, for example, 36 governors ran in the nation and 24 involved incumbents. Only five incumbents were beaten and four of these were Republicans.

"It was a tough Republican year," he said.

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He said he pointed out repeatedly during the campaign there would be a \$70 million shortfall but Evans kept insisting there was \$90 million in unpaid taxes that would solve any problem.

Although it was the first time he has ever been beaten in seven races — six for the Legislature and once for lieutenant governor — he said he is not bitter.

The disappointment wears off and the more positive memories are retained, he said.

He said he knows he ran a good race and has no apologies. In fact, it could be a plus if he were to every run again, he feels.

It was a new experience to get beat," he said, "and it hurt for a little while."

Two of his more treasured avocations, are writing newspaper columns and playing the clarinet. He plays frequently at Petershott's night club in Boise and his newspaper columns appear often in daily and weekly newspapers, including The Post-Register.

Batt said both national parties are failing to take positive stands to solve the basic economic problems in the United States.

"Neither party is coming to grips with the deficits," he said. "The Republicans won't raise taxes and the Democrats won't cut spending. We will see runaway inflation, and skyrocketing interest rates. The federal government also is softening up credit by borrowing more money. I think it is criminal for Congress not to meet the problems."

He said unless something is done "there will be a tendency on the part of voters to elect new people with innovative ideas to get the federal budget balanced."

In spite of this, he predicts all three Idaho Republicans will be re-elected Sen. Jim McClure almost certain Rep. Larry Craig with a decided edge but Rep. George Hansen "being able to ride it out again in a close race."

He said he thought Craig's probable opponent again, Larry LaRocco "is too liberal for Idaho" but acknowledged that Democrat Richard Stallings would give Hansen a horse race."

On the legislative level, he said "the Republican leadership needs point out the necessity for some its action in the past regarding education.

He noted sale of public lands was prime issue in the 1982 campaign but likely will be less so in the 1984 legislature.

Another important issue is the Swan Falls dam and settling subordinating water rights of Idaho Power Co. to those of farmers.

He said he doesn't expect Repub-

cans to have much trouble in again controlling the House by wide a margin but the Senate could be close. Republicans now have a seven-seat edge and a turnover of four seats would give the Democrats the majority.

"Idaho Republicans have a problem which any majority party has and that is it must get out and explain to the people to justify the job they are doing," said Batt. "The people will try something new if the status is not working. I think our leadership needs to get out and sell its program."

He said he believes President Reagan looks strong, particularly outside the organized groups and among the average persons.

"I think he will run again," said Batt.

The 1984 Legislature also will face the problem of whether it must re-enact the new 1.5 cent sales tax increase it imposed last year.

Batt said there could be a surplus but schools are in need of more money.

"It will be a big question of whether to terminate these taxes," he said. "Few taxes that are imposed are taken off."

Batt said Evans seems to be doing a good job in meeting the urgent needs of the state, traveling around and keeping in touch with people.

"His political appointments for the large part have been lousy," said Batt. "They are based on political consideration too much."