

The election eye . . .

May primary to hasten campaigning in 1980

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Prospective candidates are finding they must step up their campaign plans for 1980, now that the primary has been moved to the fourth Tuesday in May instead of the first Tuesday in August.

Already congressional and senatorial aspirants find they will need to announce their intentions this fall, rather than wait until winter or spring.

More important, the presidential contenders also must start early if they are to score in Idaho and other western states which also have early May primaries.

The primary in 1980 may turn out to be an interesting affair in Idaho because not only will the presidential contenders compete, but also those for one senator, both congressmen, legislative seats, prosecuting attorney, sheriff and two county commissioners.

The May primary bill passed after it appeared to be dead a number of times. It passed the Senate 23-12, with all East Idaho senators opposing it except Sen. Mark Ricks, R-Rexburg.

It appeared dead in the House, but after the state representatives heard the arguments on amendments it hurdled the lower chamber by a surprising wide 53-17 votes, with most East Idaho legislators casting negative ballots.

Three other bills that would have changed the election process failed to pass.

One that would have required 20 percent party endorsement at conventions for senatorial, congressional and gubernatorial races vaulted the House 37-33 but was buried in the Senate State Affairs Committee.

Another that would have changed the primary to September expired abruptly in the House State Affairs Committee.

A bill that would have abolished the May presidential primary passed the House 43-25 but was clobbered in the Senate 27-8.

The Post-Register

The political pulse

C-12

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Thursday, May 31, 1979

Senate Bill 1023 also made several other changes. Candidates now must file the first week in April, or April 1-7, instead of the first week in June. There is no provision for independent candidates for the primary, but they may file for the general election by June 25. They must have petitions signed by not less than 3 percent of the voters who cast ballots in the previous presidential general election.

Precinct committeemen also must be elected at the May primary and these will be eligible to attend the annual party conventions in June. A precinct committeeman must receive a least five votes for election.

Under party rules, precinct committeemen are required to be elected on the year of the conventions.

Some 20 years ago when the primary elections were held in June, the candidates generally suspended active campaigning the remainder of June and in

July and August, resuming intensive campaigning generally after Labor Day holidays for the November elections.

This practice is expected to be followed in 1980, but candidates for the major offices can plan their organizations and financial activities during the interim.

When the June primaries were held there was also a

runoff for those who did not get a majority vote. This runoff attracted such few voters that the Legislature scrapped the June primary law and reverted to the August primary.

Next year should determine if the interest is higher in May than in August. From all indications it will be, especially with the presidential preferential voting.