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The election eye

Leroy assumes key role in campaign

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

The irrepressible Attorney General David H. Leroy is the Republican nominee for lieutenant governor, a comparatively minor office, but nevertheless he is taking a prominent role in this year's Idaho election campaign.

Leroy, of course, has always been a political animal, revels in the spotlight, is personally popular with most, has a warm, outgoing personality, is in high demand as a speaker, and is clever at getting the maximum public exposure.

Only 35, he typifies best "the young man in a hurry."

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Most lieutenant governor candidates in the past kept a low profile and have been barely known to voters, but not Leroy. He ranges far and wide, even upstaging the Republican's gubernatorial nominee, Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt.

Leroy is indeed a phenomena in Idaho politics, using his office frequently for political purposes in issuing legal opinions.

Leroy is accused by his critics as being a stalking-horse for Batt. A stalking-horse is defined by Webster's unabridged dictionary as "a candidate put forward to divide the opposition in the interest of some faction or to conceal the real candidacy of some other person."

In this case, there is little question that Leroy is actually aiming for the governorship in the future. He had said he wanted to try this year but apparently decided to wait after Batt started early and tied up the big Republican money.

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Leroy's activities give strong credence to the claim of Leroy's opponent, Democrat State Sen. Mike P. Mitchell, Lewiston businessman, that he is actually running for governor, not the No. 2 post. Leroy hotly denies this, declaring it is his aim to make the lieutenant governor position an important one.

In Mitchell, Leroy has an extremely capable opponent, one who is rated by veteran political observers as one of the best Idaho state senators. Mitchell is extremely well versed in state affairs, is viewed as a champion of the trodden and is a successful businessman.

Mitchell is nonplussed about how to combat Leroy's flamboyant style and in combatting an incombent's prerogative in getting maximum in-office exposure. Mitchell, 57, emphasizes his business background; and as semi-retired, he is willing to devote fulltime to a parttime job.

Most observers view Leroy as the strong favorite to win election but his forays into the gubernatorial campaign might be overplaying his hand.