

The election eye . . .

Most Idaho Democrat leaders back Carter

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Informal discussions among most Idaho Democratic leaders and legislators indicate President Carter has their support.

The May 27 presidential election will influence many of the Democrats, although as State Democratic Party Chairman Wayne Fuller, Caldwell, explained it, it is not binding. However the primary election showing of Carter, Sen. Ted Kennedy and California Gov. Jerry Brown likely would influence potential delegates.

The legislative caucuses in all 35 legislative districts are held April 17 - well before the primary - but the state convention at Pocatello is scheduled June 12-14. The national convention is slated at New York City Aug. 11-14.

The Democratic legislators and potential candidates participated in a workshop Oct. 27 at Boise in connection with the appearance of Vice President Walter Mondale and the Frank Church fund-gathering bash. The two legislative minority leaders, Sen. Cy Chase, St. Maries, and Patricia McDermott, Pocatello, were in charge.

A nose count indicates of 38 Democrat legislators, the vast majority, or about 20, lean or flatly endorse Carter, while only a half dozen appear to favor Kennedy. None indicate support for Brown. Others were not available for comment but most of these are from South Idaho which would indicate their conservatism would favor Carter.

Some of the Democratic leaders favoring Kennedy were somewhat upset for Gov. John Evans' accepting the committee chairmanship in behalf of Carter. However, Evans has had warm working relations with the president, has been invited to the White House for advice and Carter's conservative approach is much more appealing than the liberal Kennedy and the aloof and erratic Brown.

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One of the most tremendous influences, of course, is Secretary of Interior Cecil D. Andrus who holds the cabinet post and is naturally a Carter disciple.

Andrus is still personally popular in Idaho and his return to Idaho after serving the current term indicates he may become a powerful political force in Gem State politics.

Fuller and U.S. Sen. Frank Church previously announced they will remain neutral in this intraparty hassle. Fuller said he does not feel a state chairman should take sides and Church explained he has enough worry in seeking re-election without meddling in somebody else's race which would only be a losing game.

Most Democrats feel they can support Carter because of his high personal moral character and more conservative views.

Kennedy, on the other hand, still has Chappaquiddick to plague him, and a reputation as one of the more liberal senators in the nation, a combination which is not exactly popular in conservative Idaho.

Rep. Steve Scanlin, Caldwell,

is forming a Kennedy for President Committee Committee and reports indicate some \$5,000 has been raised which is enough in any state to qualify for federal presidential campaign matching funds.

The Kennedy supporters carried buttons in behalf of their champion but they apparently were in the minority at the Church fund-raising affair. Even though Carter signs were conspicuous by their absence, the vast bulk of the Democrats are known to be sticking with the president.

President Carter performed far from impressively in the 1976 contests in Idaho. He could only garner 126,549 votes, or some 37 percent, compared with Republican Gerald Ford's 204,151, or 73 percent. That's about as wide presidential margin as has ever been recorded for president in the Gem State.

Ford was not exactly the first choice among Idaho Republicans as he was soundly

trounced in the primary by Ronald Reagan, who could very well be the party's standard bearer in 1980.

The fact that Carter is the sitting president and has powerful party supporters in Evans, Andrus and others gives him some impetus but hardly enough to give rise to Democratic hopes that he has much of a chance of winning the state if he is the Democratic nominee.

Most of Kennedy's strength comes, as can be expected, from more liberal North Idaho but it is at a low ebb in most of South Idaho.

Kennedy's leadership in seeking more gun control, expansive National Health Insurance and unbridled federal spending is like waving a red flag among conservatives.

Carter has moderated his views on gun control so that it is acceptable to most Idahoans while he has flatly opposed Kennedy's National Health Program and many other proposals.