

The Post-Register

The political pulse

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Legislative limelights . . .

Legislators analyze effects on campaign

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BOISE — As the legislators enter the last third and perhaps the most crucial tests of the session, many appear sensitive to what the people back home are thinking.

This is only natural because the filing period of April 1-7 is less than a month away, while the primary election is May 24, less than three months away. Anyone facing primary contests thus has only two months for campaigning.

They know that every vote they cast on important and controversial issues will come under scrutiny by their political opponent, whether it be in their own primary or at the Nov. 2 general election.

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This political situation was brought to light forcibly Friday when Lloyd Hicks, Rigby, announced his candidacy for state representative in District 20 for the seat presently held by Rep. Wayne E. Tibbitts, R-Lorenzo, the 79-year-old veteran who has served nine terms, ranking fifth in seniority and first in age.

Hicks is employed as an engineer at the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory but also claims to be a rancher near Rigby and co-owner of a construction company.

There are others mentioned as possible primary contenders for the Tibbitts seat, Joan Wood and Joe Treasure, in addition to Hicks.

Tibbitts has said he will make up his mind just before the Legislature adjourns late this month on whether he will seek re-election. Currently, he said, he is leaning against it.

Generally, most incumbents do not face challenges in the primary. Contests usually develop when the seat is vacant as result of an office holder deciding not to run again or seeking another office. As a result there are few legislative primary races.

In the six east Idaho legislative districts, there were four primary races in 1980 but only one incumbent—Tibbitts—was challenged. Tibbitts easily won and then scored a general election victory.

In the other Republican primary contests, Rich Orme, St. Anthony, defeated Daniel S.

Hess, Rexburg, for the Republican nomination in District 28; and in District 31, William L. Floyd, Idaho Falls potato plant manager, nosed out Don Penfold, Darby farmer.

In the only legislative Democratic primary fracas, Doug Holm, Roberts farmer, defeated Tom Harrington, Rigby high school teacher, in District 20. Holm is mentioned as a contestants again this year.

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It is rare indeed for incumbent legislators to be ousted but it has happened. Floyd defeated Democrat Sen. Richard A. Egbert, R-Tetonia, and Martin Trillhaase bested Rep. Wendell Miller, D-Idaho Falls, in 1980, mainly as result of a strong Republican tide engendered by President Reagan. Before that, only four other incumbents have been defeated in the past 20 years in east Idaho as far as this writer can remember. Egbert and Miller were considered among colleagues as two of the outstanding legislators from east Idaho.

Miller is being urged by Democrats for rematch with Trillhaase but Egbert has left it clear he will not seek his old seat.

Cyril Slansky, retired Idaho Falls scientist, is also being boosted by backers for a possible rematch with Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls.

Rumors also are widespread that former House Speaker Allan F. Larsen, Republican, may challenge State Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, in District 27, made up mostly of Bingham County.

In the state, very few incumbents are beaten but it does happen, mainly because of some local issue or a strong statewide party trend. In 1980, Democrats found the going tough against the strong Republican trend and some half dozen incumbents were unseated. In 1982, the situation could be reversed.

There could be drastic upheavals in the 1982 election but barring some unexpected developments and based on past election history, it would be a fairly safe bet that all of the incumbents in east Idaho and most in the state will be re-elected if they care to return—and the vast majority apparently do.