Legislative limelights . . .

Election law changes not needed now for '82

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The 1981 Idaho Legislature indicated it didn't want any changes in the present primary laws for 1982, and because of the gubernatorial veto on legislative reapportionment there is no reason to reverse this thinking in the next session.

Majority Leader Walter E. Little, R-New Plymouth, suggested the May 26 primary be postponed to August or early September because of probable new reapportionment changes in legislative district boundaries.

Little complains that because the Legislature meets until late March, the incumbents would have little time for campaigning. However, this law has been in effect the last couple of elections and it didn't seem to make much difference. In fact, it was a benefit as it shortened the primary electioneering. In the past, except for top statewide offices, nominees suspended campaign after the May election until September for the November general primary.

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Little does have a valid point in changing residency law that would waive the requirement that legislative candidates live in their new districts one year prior to the general election. This can be done in cases where boundary changes moved incumbents into a new district. It is the reasoning their houses didn't move, only the district boundaries.

The two probable gubernatorial candidates, Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, also question the moving of the primary because it would give the Republican nominee only a short time for campaigning against Democrat Gov. John V. Evans. The Idaho Republican Party under Chairman Dennis Olsen opposed the change, but mostly for political reasons. Olsen and other party leaders feel a divisive primary could hurt their nominee for the general election, contending this was the case in 1978.

Their stand was a dominant factor in a House-passed bill changing the primary from the last Tuesday in May to August being defeated in the Senate. It passed the House 39-29 with two absent but it never got out of the Senate State Affairs Committee, made up primarily of legislative leaders. Another bill that would have changed the primary from May to September never even got out of the House State Affairs Committee.

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Many feel the primary should be moved from May to early September but it should be done to accommodate the voters, not the party leaders or the county clerks who have their own selfish reasons.

Republican party leaders only want more time for their nominee to campaign against the incumbent but the Democrats had the same problem some 25 years ago.

County clerks also oppose changes because they complain it doesn't give them enough time to prepare for a November general election from a September primary. Actually, it would mean they might need to put out a little extra effort and this could be done by hiring temporary additional help if needed.

Election laws are supposed to be for benefit of voters, not party leaders or county clerks.

There are many advantages for a September primary, such as shortening the campaign time and after most people are finished with summer vacations and ready for school.

It must be admitted statewide candidates, such as those for governor and other state office and U.S. Senate have only a short campaign time. This is less true for the congressional and certainly for legislative and county candidates who could get along well on six weeks campaigning.

If there are any changes it should be made a year in advance of the election to give candidates ample opportunity to plan ahead, not a kneejerk action as suggested by Little.