

# The Post-Register

## The political pulse

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The election eye . . .

# Larsen—silent factor in gubernatorial race

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The one man who may not even run and who has said little continues to be the powerful enigma in the gubernatorial race, likely the headliner in the 1982 campaign.

He is Allan F. Larsen, 62-year-old Moreland farmer who is best remembered as confounding the political experts by winning the Republican nomination four years ago. He succumbed decisively to Democratic Gov. John V. Evans in the general election, however.

Larsen is keeping his own counsel but the other probable Republican adversaries, Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt, who has announced; and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, Twin Falls, who has scheduled Sept. 8 for his formal entry, are concerned.

The decision Thursday of Attorney General David H. Leroy to seek the lieutenant governorship, rather than governor, could be a factor in encouraging Larsen to now jump into the gubernatorial primary.

Leroy, only 34, is viewed by most as a middle of road, with strength in both the conservative and moderate factions of the party. His decision to withdraw likely helps Batt slightly more than Olmstead.

As matters now stand it would be a head-to-head encounter between Olmstead and Batt.

Olmstead, of course, is hoping Larsen will keep out because his entry would drain away conservative votes which he hopes to glean against the more moderate Batt.

This writer has repeatedly predicted Leroy likely would seek the lieutenant governorship, rather than governor, in an effort to keep a high profile for more ambitious political aspirations later, such as governor or U.S. senator.

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In a two-man race, Olmstead would hold the edge as records show the Republicans have not nominated a moderate since Gov. Robert E. Smylie held the position 1956-66. A Larsen entry, however, could give the advantage to Batt because Olmstead and Larsen would split the conservative votes.

In the meantime, Larsen holds the key. Most believe he would not win but they felt that way in 1978. He could be an important factor and his endorsement also could be highly prized.

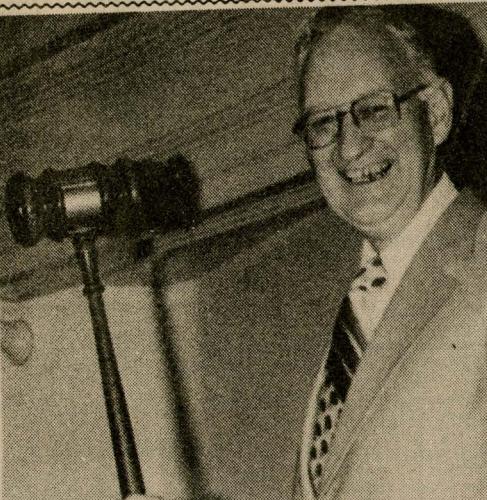
Also it must be considered that another candidate as yet unmentioned could jump into the fray, now that Leroy has pulled out.

Hard at work on his 400-acre irrigated farm at Moreland west of Blackfoot, Larsen said in a Post-Register telephone interview he has not definitely made up his mind whether to run but he did leave the clear impression he likely would not.

Larsen declined to definitely state his position. Asked which way he was leaning, he responded, "I'm leaning to taking care of my farm." He did add that his decision would not be affected over who enters the race.

To enter a major contest, a candidate must have a consuming desire to win and ample campaign funds, and it would appear Larsen has neither at this time.

The Republican gubernatorial candidates feel also that Larsen won't run, but Larsen has



## Political mystery

left the door ajar. He could be a definite threat, say, up to the end of this year at the latest.

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Larsen is viewed by most as a staid conservative but he also is colorful in his congenial mannerisms, his ready knowledge of politics, and a compelling if not forceful speaker that goes over well with Idaho voters.

Larsen served 12 years in the Idaho House of Representatives, the last four in the top job as speaker.

He was generally rated by political observers as among the most effective in that position. He had full control for the most part, although the House Republicans in recent years have been traditionally split in three factions—the majority conservatives, moderates, and extreme right.

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What the politicos remember most about him is his sensational victory in the 1978 primary when polls showed him to be running third, behind Vernon F. Ravencroft, former legislator and party chairman; and C.L. "Butch" Otter, Boise, Simplot company executive and also a former legislator.

In the closing days of the campaign, Otter made the fatal mistake of accusing Larsen in a picnic rally in Idaho Falls of using the LDS churches and people for his own political purposes.

Now, the Mormons view politics in about the same light as anyone else but such slurs rightfully whips up their wrath, just as it might have done with any other religious or select group.

As a result, election records showed the Mormon voters turned out in far greater numbers in east Idaho than any other section of the state to vote almost as a bloc for Larsen and he won by 1,700 votes over Ravencroft, with Otter 3,000 votes behind. Three others trailed far in the rear. The 10 east Idaho counties gave Larsen 12,452 for his victory margin, followed by Ravencroft 5,136, and Otter, who had hoped to lead, only 4,052.

The general election was a different story. Evans won 34 of the 44 counties and 59 percent of the vote. Evans even won Idaho Falls but Larsen ran ahead in rural precincts to barely win Bonneville 10,321 to 10,003. Larsen who had expected to win big in East Idaho, copped the 10 east Idaho counties only 29,078 to 23,383.

Larsen could again enter the political arena for other races, such as possibly as a state senatorial candidate, especially if the incumbent, State Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, seeks the 2nd Congress post, as he has mentioned.

Many Republicans fear that Larsen's entry may again revive the so-called "Mormon Issue" and virtually assure defeat of any Republican nominee. Some Republican leaders assert if Ravencroft had won the nomination he could have defeated Evans in 1978. This can be viewed with extreme doubt because Evans handily defeated Ravencroft for lieutenant governor in 1974 when neither held the office. It would seem with incumbency, Evans had the definite edge in 1978 and this advantage may even increase in 1982 against whoever is the Republican nominee.