

Legislative limelights...

Gubernatorial hopes mar legislative amity

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

It's seldom mentioned but it's very strong in the back of minds of many legislators that much of what is now taking place in the Idaho Legislature is a preliminary leading to the 1982 gubernatorial contests.

It's still more than a year away and there is one more legislative session to tackle before the 1982 general elections, but much of the hassles now brewing can be laid to the ambitions of the prospective gubernatorial candidates.

This is particularly true on the controversies swirling on the public employee salary increases, right to work, public education, Sagebrush Rebellion, health and welfare funding and the appointments to the Northwest Public Power Commission, plus a number of lesser topics, all of which could be juicy 1982 campaign issues.

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At presents there is one Democrat, Gov. John Evans, and four Republicans considered possible gubernatorial candidates — Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt, House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, lobbyist and former legislator, Vernon F. Ravenscroft and former House speaker and the 1978 gubernatorial nominee, Allan F. Larsen, Blackfoot farmer.

In analyzing the picture now, Larsen appears to hold the key on whether some of the other candidates will seek the state's top executive position. To a lesser extent, Ravenscroft, who won the 1974 lieutenant governorship nomination and finished a close second to Larsen in 1978, is also a factor. Until these two decide what they will do, the Republican gubernatorial field is in a state of flux, so to speak.

These prospective candidates must make up their mind by the end of the year, assuming, of course, the 1982 primary will be moved from May to either August or September, as appears probable. If the May date remains, then the candidates need to decide by late fall.

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Evans, of course, is certain to be the Democratic nominee. The only other possible contender, former Gov. Cecil D. Andrus, who just finished serving as U.S. secretary of interior, would never oppose him. However, keep Andrus in mind for later; say, the 1986 election.

Of the present Republicans, Batt and Olmstead appear the most interested; Leroy is vacillating while Larsen and Ravenscroft are undecided.

A Friends for Olmstead Committee headed by the energetic Rep. Tom Stivers, R-Twin Falls,

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has been organized to launch Olmstead's campaign.

Batt has sent out feelers for donations and has been heartened in raising some \$20,000, far beyond his original expectation of \$5,000.

Leroy also has made some inquiries but he knows his age, only 33, is a handicap (what a nice handicap) but he feels the vigorous way he has conducted his office has given him a strong profile. This is an observation that carries some justification.

Leroy also acknowledges that he might look at the lieutenant governor contest, assuming Batt will try for the top spots. If that were the case, Leroy would then challenge C.L. Otter, also a former 1978 gubernatorial contender and former legislator and now a Simplot Co. executive.

It would appear if Leroy can stay in the public eye, he likely would be a formidable candidate; say, in four or eight years when he age would not be an adverse factor.

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Larsen is a puzzle and right now he doesn't know himself whether he will run or not. He has indicated if there is an extensive ground swell he might take the plunge — and this is highly probable. If he does and it influences Olmstead and Leroy to drop out, then it could be an interesting race among Larsen, Batt, and anyone else who might decide he has a chance.

Ravenscroft's views are clearcut. He said he is dickered now on an important business opportunity. If it materializes, he will forego the race. If he doesn't, then he is a probable, remarking "I've always wanted to be governor."

Olmstead asserts strongly that he is not going to let his gubernatorial aspirations interfere with his House speaker duties. He may find this difficult, although he no doubt is sincere.

Batt has been careful in actions and words, preferring to keep a low profile for the time being at least. He is not taken in confidences of the Legislative leadership, such as invited to party caucuses, but that likely has more advantages than disadvantages, anyway.

A Republican Party move to require 25 percent convention endorsement for candidates would limit the field to three. Olmstead opposes the action, Batt and Leroy appear in favor, Larsen is undecided and Ravenscroft is non-committal. From views heard around the Legislature, the proposal faces a tough fight, and if it were to pass, Evans likely would veto it.

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Legislative limelights

Pressure swayed vote on right-to-work end

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
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Defeat of the right-to-work legislation last week was a mild surprise but the margin by which it was clobbered was even more of an eyebrow raiser.

The measure which had vaulted the House by a thumping 49-21 margin the day before was scuttled by a 20-15 votes Thursday. The surprise of this was the swing of eight Republicans to join a solid bloc of 12 Democrats to nail the coffin on an issue which has reared its head in the Legislature for most of the last 30 years.

The measure was beaten on a technical maneuver of a motion to table, one that precludes debate, which is just as well.

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There is little question the fine hands of U.S. Sen. James A. McClure and Idaho Republican Party Chairman Dennis M. Olsen who urged that the highly emotional issue not be passed, was a strong factor in the bill's defeat. Both McClure and Olsen rightfully feared the proposal would unite labor to bring defeat to Republican candidates. The Idaho Republican Party Central Committee had taken a stand against right to work just five days before the Thursday vote.

Even Robert Kinghorn, the AFL-CIO director, could only figure on 15 certain votes against the measure, three short of the majority of 18 needed, a few days before the election. This included all 12 Democrats and Republican Sens. Edith Klein, and Vern Brassey, Boise, and John Barker, Buhl. He had hoped to sway three others but instead a surprising five gave support.

Perhaps the most startling surprise was the switch of Sen. Walter Yarbrough, R-Grand View, caucus chairman and considered one of the leading conservatives in the Senate. In addition, however, joining the bandwagon, was another Republican leader, Assistant Majority Leader Sen.

J. Wilson Steen, Glenns Ferry, who is a former union trainman, and three conservative freshmen, Sens. Laird Noh, Kimberly; Roger Fairchild, Fruitland, and Terry Sverdsten, Cataldo.

It must be remembered, Right to Work is not strictly a partisan issue, although most Democrat leaders are for it and most Republicans against. In the House, it took considerable courage or bad judgment — depending how one looks at it — for the lone Democrat and the House minority leader at that, Rep. Melvin Hammond, Rexburg, to desert his party and join 48 Republicans. Here again, eight moderate Republicans joined Democrats in opposition.

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The bill's sponsor, Rep. John Brooks, R-Gooding, was miffed at the way the bill was tabled rather than defeated on motion. He vows now to bring it up again next session but he had better save his breathe. It likely will have less chance in 1982 when there is a general election and the legislators are more sensitive on political issues, especially right to work.

It might be observed Brooks forecast for victory of between 43 and 48 in the House was good (there were 49) but the 20 for the Senate (there were only 15) was a disaster for him.

McClure, Olsen and Republican leaders remember 1952 when the proposal was submitted to the people and it was voted down narrowly, 120,077 against to 115,765 in favor.

Just as important, however, many Republican legislative candidates were beaten. Shortly after than, the Democrats gained control of the House — in 1959 — the last time they have done so.

Not going into the merits of the proposal, most business leaders agree relations between business and low key union labor has been excellent in Idaho through the years. Most of these leaders apparently felt to stir this controversial issue would bring more harm than good.