

Legislative limelights...

Gubernatorial hopes mar legislative amity

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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,

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 dickering 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.