

The Post-Register

The political pulse

E-4

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, December 2, 1981

Congressional comments . . .

Idaho solons learn to take offensive

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After many years playing the defensive game, the Idaho all Republican delegation is beginning to learn how to take the offensive, now that it has a majority the Senate and the preddency, and is within striking distance in the House.

For the first time in nearly 50 years, Idaho's congressional delegation is all Republican which has immense advantages when holding majorities but also is a double edged sword in not having a voice with the Democrats. This was recognized in a recent column which observed that some 30 percent or more of Idahoans who lean strongly Demoratic, plus the moderate Republicans and independents, have virtually no representation in Congress.

It was somewhat humorous early this year when Sens. James A. McClure and Steve D. Symms and Reps. George Hansen and Larry Craig almost acted as members of the minority party because that was what they had been used to.

Of course, the House is still Democratic controlled but by a narrow margin and the many Democratic southern congressmen who often vote with Reagan places the majority in a questionable status.

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All of the Idaho Republican members of Congress are in strategic positions to help Reagan but McClure is a tower of strength as the Republican Conference or caucus chairman. He is thus third in Senate leadership, next to the Senate majority leader and assistant majority leader, or whip. He is also chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee which has a strong voice for the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory. He is also member of the Senate Appropriations, and Rules and Administration Committees.

Symms hold no major committee chairmanships but is a member of the important Senate

Budget, Envivornment and Public Works, Finance and Joint Economics committes, and is chairman of the Senate transportation subcommittee and the Senate estate and gift taxation subcommittee.

Both Hansen and Craig, as members of the minority party in the House, naturally hold no chairmanships. Craig is a freshmen member of the Education and Labor, Interior and Insular Affairs, and Select Committee on Aging. Hansen is a senior member of Agriculture, and Science and Technology committees.

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All four Republicans generally vote as a single unit on key measures but this also raises the question of whether the opposing view is fairly represented. This issue likely will come under scrutiny in the 1982 elections when both Idaho Republican congressmen face re-election. McClure faces re-election in 1984 but Symms not until 1986. Despite the bitter criticisms of the hard right, Democratic U.S. Sen. Frank Church gave balance to the congressional delegation and enabled Idaho to have input in both major parties.

McClure, who was criticized by this writer recently for his failure to more adequately communicate with the people back home and thus isolate himself in Washington, pointed out that to properly represent the state he has been tremendously busy in Washington, certainly a valid point.

McClure's influence is steadily expanding in the national capital as a leading spokesman of the Republican conservatives who now rule the roost.

As a member of the leadership his efforts in seeking to reach a settlement in the federal government budget and spending, his thrusts in behalf of the INEL and his influence to arrive at decisions on the wide spectrum of federal lands will have a profound effect in the state and nation.