

The political pulse

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The election eye

Watch for gimmicks during silly season

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

Now that the general election campaign is nearing the homestretch phase, the real silly season is at hand.

Idaho citizens had better be doubly careful over the reams of rhetoric disseminated by the candidates and their supporters and learn to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Of deep concern are the distortions and misrepresentations that are freely distributed during the heat of the campaign, adding to the confusion of the voters.

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As in past years, the most serious are the misleading titles carried by various special groups and organizations.

In this category are the Associated Taxpayers of Idaho, The Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry; a new one this year, B.R.I.M.S.T.O.N.E., which is sending scurrilous pamphlets in cartoon form about Gov. John V. Evans, the so-called Freedom to Work, and others.

Right-to-Work is a blatant misnomer but wide publicity has pretty well disclosed it as a largely anti-labor union group.

Both the Associated Taxpayers of Idaho and the Idaho Association of Commerce and Industry are business organizations, dominated mostly by the big utilities and corporations. Yet, they attempt to appear they represent a broad base of the average taxpayer. This is not so.

This is not criticizing business because it is a viable part of life in Idaho. It's only the misleading labels. Both the IACI and ATI and other industrial and business oriented groups have highly paid lobbyists and staff personnel to protect their interests, particularly during sessions of the Idaho Legislature.

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Also to be studied are the rankings given to members of the Idaho congressional delegation and Idaho legislators on the way they voted on various legislation. Generally, it is no compliment to those who are ranked high because it means they are listening to the vested and self interest groups. It is those congressmen and legislators who are in the middle bracket who probably are more akin to representing the Idaho voters.

For example, the strong opposition expressed by the Idaho Realtors Association and the Associated Taxpayers of Idaho to the Residential Tax Initiative is probably the best recommendation for voting for its enactment by the average property owner because these two groups represent self serving interests.

Similarly, endorsements by the Idaho Education Association, Idaho Farm Bureau, Idaho Employee Association and other statewide groups can be viewed with some reservations

because they also represent their own interests, not necessarily that of the public.

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Only the volunteer groups which generally seek to promote good government can be viewed with credibility. These are such organizations as the League of Women Voters, American Association of University Women and some of the less radical environmental and human service groups. Many may not agree as to their goals and tactics but it must be remembered they give freely of their time and money and don't stand to gain financially.

The national organization, Common Cause, another group which serves as watchdog over shenanigans in government, strives for better government but it also is criticized as being over zealous on some issues.

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That brings up the question of who really represents the common man on the street. They can't afford well-heeled lobbyists and they aren't organized. It is most newspapers which seek to report the news and disclose some of the improprieties that go on in Boise. Most legislators have good intentions but they are subject to intense pressures from the lobbyists.

The same thing goes on at Washington but on a far larger and grander scale.

For the first half of the Legislature, legislators are wined and dined by the lobby groups almost daily, such as at evening dinners and receptions, noon luncheons and other gatherings. It's free food and drinks. It is no wonder so many become captives of the vested interests.

It is regrettable that Sens. James A. McClure and Steve Symms and Reps. George Hansen and Larry Craig publicize their high ratings with ultra conservative organizations and others with radical right wing groups. Of these, McClure and Craig have more moderate rankings than Symms and Hansen.

All of these awards are not necessarily in the best interest of the public. From a good government point of view it is questionable if these are indeed high honors.

Another ploy used are endorsements and appearances by well known leaders in behalf of one candidate or another. Actually, voting records show these often tend to harm rather than help a candidate. Most Idahoans resent outsiders, no matter their prestige, coming to Idaho to advise voters.

Even presidential visits are more often than not a hindrance, rather than a help. However, they are used mostly as a window dressing but their benefits are of dubious merits.

Let the issues be well aired but it should be done honestly and without distortions so that people can choose on facts, not gimmicks.

Chances fade for debate

Wed Oct 13, 1982

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor
Chances for a possible face-to-face debate between the two gubernatorial contenders in Idaho Falls have evaporated.

The Zonta Club of Idaho Falls had expressed interest in sponsoring a debate between Democratic Gov. John V. Evans and his Republican challenger, Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt.

However Susan Ohman, of Zonta, said the club has given up efforts for getting the two contenders together for a fourth and final debate.

The dates don't appear as much a stumbling block as does the format.

The governor wants a town hall type in which audience can ask the questions while Batt insists on questions asked from a panel of newsmen.

Batt said he would favor a final one along this type in Idaho Falls but Frank Olander, of the governor's campaign staff, insists on audience participation to give a broader range in discussions.

Olander said the governor would make dates available for further debates along this line. The governor plans to be in Idaho Falls Oct. 25 and again Oct. 30.

Batt plans visits here Wednesday and Thursday and again Oct. 22.

The two have held town hall type of meetings in Caldwell, Twin Falls and Lewiston, plus a debate via public television over the Pocatello, Boise and Moscow stations.

In all three cases, they fielded questions from the audience.