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The election eye . . .

Right-to-Work issue torments campaign

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The circulation of fund-raising letters by the newly-formed Idaho Employee Rights Campaign Committee under State Sen. William Moore, R-Hayden Lake, interjects the long-expected Right-to-Work issue into the coming campaign.

Sen. William Moore

It was one which both the Republican and Democratic leadership had hoped to avoid because it carries a double-edge sword that can help or hinder candidates.

In the legislative halls, Moore is considered by his colleagues as the extreme right radical.

He is placing himself as the self-appointed spokesman to raise a fund particularly aimed at Gov. John V. Evans and three state senators, Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot; John Peavey, D-Carey, and Vernon Brassey, R-Boise.

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Moore apparently is taking the place of the Idaho Freedom to Work Committee headed by the abrasive Pete Bratt, Boise, to further this touchy issue. Bratt, Dennis M.Olsen, Idaho Falls, state Republican chairman, 1st District Congressman Larry Craig and others have sought to blame eastern union leaders as responsible for the Bunker Hill mine closure. They then pornced on this as another reason why Right-to-Work should be enacted in Idaho.

Without going into the merits of the Right-to-Work issue, most observers believed that the Idaho Freedom to Work Committee would seek at least 29,000 signatures to place the issue on the ballot. These signatures must be filed by July 1 so it would appear time is short to go this route.

Most of the experienced political leaders, such as Lt.Gov. Philip E. Batt, generally believe there are as many minuses as pluses as to Right-to-Work's effect on candidates of each party. Some of the more staunch Republican conservatives, like House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, believe their pro-Right-to-Work posture will help them.

It is significant that neither Sen. James A. McClure or U.S. Rep. George Hansen has taken a strong stand on behalf of Right-to Work. Sen. Steve Symms has expressed sympathy but not to the point that he is agitating for the proposal.

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Why Moore and his supporters are targeting on Evans, Merrill, Peavey and Brassey is a mystery, because all of the 12 Democratic state senators, plus Republicans Brassey and Sen. Edith Klein Miller, R-Boise, voted to sustain the governor's veto. Thus a vote to override the veto fell three votes short of the required two thirds.

The veto failed by only three votes for sustaining in the House, 46-21, with three Republicans absent. It was supported by 13 Democrats and five Republicans. Rep. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, the House minority leader, was the only Democrat of 26 in the Legislature who voted for the override.

Moore charged Evans accepted "tens of thouands of dollars" from the union "power brokers," including $6,000 "in a plastic bag from a union official;" Brassey had taken "huge amounts" of labor contributions; Merrill received $2,500; and Peavey received "thousands from union sources."

Evans responded the contributions made at a Democratic party function in Boise shortly after the veto contained personal checks given by union members. They were primarily from workers at the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory of east Idaho.

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Actually, most Democratic senators, legislators, Mrs. Miller and a number of Republican legislators receive labor contributions.

The text of the letter indicated that union labor donations are tainted. Yet most legislators get contributions from the private power utilities and large corporations which actually have more legislative influence than could ever be dreamed by labor.

To launch a campaign funding on a single campaign issue, no matter how emotional, is highly questionable. Moore's letter was replete with spiteful rhetoric that could only be accepted by the most radical anti-labor people.

Both Republican gubernatorial candidates, Olmstead and Batt, have taken an official stand in favor of Right-to-Work. But this issue is only one of many that will be argued in both the May 25 and Nov. 2 election campaigns.