

Olmstead plans earlier gubernatorial race entry

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House speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, announced Friday he likely will move up his expected announcement for the gubernatorial contest.

He had planned earlier to announce in the fall but he said he now may jump into the contest in August, in time to appear as a full-fledged gubernatorial candidate for the number of fairs scheduled in late August and in September.

"I have been doing a lot of traveling and speaking at many places so that I could get good public exposure," said Olmstead in a telephone interview with The Post-Register from his Twin Falls home.

Olmstead said the special session the coming week also will give him an opportunity to strengthen his political fences and expand his exposure.

Olmstead said he has hired Ben Spencer, who worked for the National Republican Committee in the Pacific Northwest, to serve as his campaign manager.

Spencer already has established a state campaign office in Boise to begin preliminary activities.

Spencer was born and raised in Utah and has had experience in Idaho politics.

Olmstead would be the second Republican candidate to announce for the contest, following Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt who formally jumped into the race last spring.

Olmstead said he believes the decision of Vernon F. Ravenscroft, former gubernatorial con-

tender and past legislator and state party chairman, not to seek the post, will help his chances.

He noted both he and Ravenscroft carry a conservative image that would split this bloc of voters if Ravenscroft were a contender.

He said he likely will talk with former House Speaker Allan F. Larsen, Blackfoot, to see what are his plans. Larsen has indicated he will not run but has left the door open.

The only other gubernatorial contender mentioned at this time is Attorney General David H. Leroy, who also is eying the lieutenant governor post.

"At any rate," said Olmstead, "I am going ahead with my plans to enter the contest."

Olmstead is serving his fifth term in the Legislature and was elected House speaker three years ago to replace Larsen, who sought the gubernatorial nomination.

Olmstead scored an upset when he narrowly defeated by two votes the favorite, House Majority Leader Walter E. Little, R-New Plymouth, for the coveted speakership in the 1978 session, and easily turned back by more than 2-1 margin the challenge of a right wing legislator, Rep. Dan Emery, R-Boise, for the position in 1980.

In other matters, Olmstead said it appears the abbreviated regional management system in the Department of Health and Welfare instituted by the new director, Les Purce, appears to be satisfactory in cutting costs, and that he has no objection to including a proposal for repaying \$5.5 million to the Water Pollution Fund in the special session, although it could wait until the next session.