

How Hansen handles courts may decide fate

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How Congressman George Hansen handles this latest in a long list of troubles with federal officials may likely determine his political future.

His most recent in a long list of court battles took place Monday when he filed a motion seeking dismissal of charges that he filed false financial disclosure reports. The government now has until May 31 to

respond to the dismissal motion, with a hearing on the motion scheduled for June 3. A June 20 trial date has been slated.

The defense, represented by Attorney Frank Campbell in U.S. District Court in Washington, D.C., contended the indictment is a violation of the speech or debate clause of the U.S. Constitution, that in providing for civil and administrative enforcement of the Ethics in Government

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Act, Congress barred the use of criminal penalties in connection with the report; and that the charges represent selective prosecution.

The situation this time is different with Reagan's Republican administration taking after a member of its own party. He can't very well charge that the latest plot is one hatched by the Democrats.

Political pulse

He has been indicted by a federal grand jury on four counts of failing to disclose financial transactions to the House, including loans from Texas millionaire Nelson Bunker Hunt.

The case likely will draw out through much of the summer, paving the way for the start of the 1984 political campaign in a rematch with Richard Stallings, Ricks College professor, who has indicated he will try again.

All of Hansen's fellow members in Idaho's congressional delegation came to his defense, urging people to withhold judgment on him until the case is decided.

Idaho Republican Chairman Dennis Olsen, Idaho Falls, added the ethics law at one time had sanctions but they were dropped when the law was adopted. He noted the House

Ethics Committee is in no way involved in the investigations of the Justice Department.

He said further three of the four counts the federal grand jury listed involve transactions of Hansen's wife, Connie. Those transactions fell under a separate property agreement which was disclosed to the House Ethics Committee in 1978.

A man of the street survey draws mixed opinions — some defending him, others opposed — but some of the critical independents say they may withdraw their support.

The key to the entire situation in the political situation is how many of the crucial 2 to 7 percent of the independent swing voters feel. Hansen can't afford to lose many of these or he will face defeat in the 1984 general elections.

In the 1982 general election, the free-swinging Hansen defeated Stallings 83,873 to 76,608, or a majority of 7,265. This is a margin of only 2 percent. In other words a shift of only 3,700 voters of some 160,481 who cast ballots could reverse the results.

Recent past election results indicate Hansen has about 43 percent solidly in his corner, regardless of what happens. However, he also has 40 percent who will oppose him, regardless who is his challenger. That leaves 7 percent or less as the swing vote.

It might be observed that this same situation also confronted U.S.

Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, most of his tenure. When conditions were ripe, it finally brought his defeat in 1980 in the face of a strong challenger in Steve Symms and a powerful Republican tide.

Hansen's closest call was in 1976 when he defeated Firth school superintendent Stan Kress by only 1,976 votes after his first brush with the Department of Justice on charges of filing late and false campaign finance reports in his 1974 primary.

A large outspoken man (he's 6 feet 7 inches, and weighs in excess of 300 lbs.), Hansen is considered by his colleagues as unpredictable and a darling of the right wingers. He is viewed as a maverick, does well in handling individual requests but has sponsored little legislation in his own name.

Trouble is nothing new to Hansen; it appears a way of life with him.

The House Ethics Committee turned him down once on his request to let him appeal to the public to help allay deep personal debts from campaign spending. He promptly turned the fund-raising to his wife, Connie.

In 1975, he pleaded guilty to two misdemeanor charges of filing late and false campaign finance reports from his 1974 primary. A two-year

prison sentence was suspended and Hansen paid a \$2,000 fine. His attorney said he was not dishonest, just stupid.

He made two self-imposed trips to Iran in 1978-79 in unsuccessful efforts to effect release of the American hostages and then in July 1979 with Democrat Rep. Larry McDonald, Georgia, went to Nicaragua to assure the dictator Anastasio Somoza of American support. Somoza was later overthrown and fled the country.

A native of Teton, he served in the Air Force, worked as a high school teacher and in the insurance business. He was elected mayor of Alameda in 1961, a city later annexed by Pocatello.

He was elected to the House in 1965, ran a losing race to Jim McClure for the Senate in 1968, and served as deputy under secretary in the Agriculture Department from 1969 to 1971. He won re-election to the House in 1974 and every election since. In the 1974 election, he ousted the incumbent Republican, Orval Hansen.

It will be interesting to see how Hansen handles this latest joust with the federal courts. It adds spice to what had already earlier appeared a steaming 1984 congressional campaign.