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The election eye . . .

Batt appears leading but Olmstead gaining

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

With the primary election only two weeks away and interest still at an apathetic level, political observers are taking a close look at the top state race for the favorite.

Polls of two years proved so inaccurate that newspapers and others which conducted them appear to be shying away this year.

It is not too difficult to figure out races which are lopsided but those within, say, 5 percentage points, are something else.

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The feature primary race, but a far cry from the one four years ago, is for the Republican gubernatorial race between Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead. In 1978, there were six primary contestants and they whipped up considerable interest in the closing two weeks.

Most veteran observers feel that Batt has held a decided edge so far in the campaign by virtue of better organization, more money and more campaigning but Olmstead now appears getting into stride and closing the gap.

If Batt does win, it will be the first time in 20 years-since Gov. Robert E. Smylie-that a moderate candidate has plucked the gubernatorial nomination.

Both have attacked Democrat Gov. John Evans on what they say has been his anti-business and anti-growth policies up to this year but it's the differences between the two that is important at this time.

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This writer asked both the question within the last week: why a voter should vote for him rather than his opponent?. Batt replied he could best handle state problems and is the strongest Republican candidate to beat Evans. Olmstead responded that although both have somewhat similar legislative background their record "clearly shows" he is the one who "favors a lean responsible conservative government."

These contrasting statements, of course, are for the Republican voters to judge. In the final analysis, just as it has been the case in the past, it will be personal appeal and charisma that decides the winner, everything else being about equal.