

Right-to-work may have backlash ^{undated}

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register columnist

The so-called right-to-work legislation passed the Idaho Legislature in this session, but it may come back to haunt the Republican lawmakers in the 1986 general elections.

The legislation was sponsored by Rep. Myron Jones, R-Malad, a rancher-farmer who is serving his fourth term.

Idaho is the first state to adopt a right-to-work law since 1976. The 1985 version passed by the Legislature outlaws union membership or payment of union dues as a condition of employment in Idaho.

Since passage three weeks ago on a virtual party-line vote, the matter has been bounced to the courts for final determination as to its legal ramifications.

Rep. Ed Brown, Pocatello, was the only Republican in the Legislature to vote against the measure and that's because he is from the strong labor city of Pocatello. All Democrats opposed the law.

One has to go back to 1958 when the issue was put on the Idaho ballot. It was the hottest issue in that campaign, drawing a record vote. National labor unions come to Idaho to spend considerable sums of money and effort to help reject the proposal by a slim 3,000 votes.

But it was even more significant that voters also gave Democratic majorities in both the House and Senate, the last time that has happened in the intervening years.

Whether the fact the right-to-work issue will appear on the 1986 ballot may repeat the voting legislative pattern remains to be seen. Apparently

the Idaho Republican Party and legislators are willing to gamble it won't.

It would appear that the strong conservative trend in Idaho and the nation may have reached its zenith this year during the Ronald Reagan reign. There could be a reverse to a more moderate level in 1986.

It must be remembered Reagan will not be on the ballot two years hence. In fact, he can't run for re-election any more and his influence may naturally have abated. Legislators may have to run on their own popularity without the Reagan coattails for help.

Much will depend on how the labor force fares in the next two years as to whether there will be a backlash against the Republicans. Gov. John V. Evans, Democrat leaders and labor officials predict there will be.

If unemployment increases and the laboring man suffers, then it would work in behalf of the Democrats and labor. If the economy continues to prosper and employment is at a high level, the reverse would be true.

It also must be remembered the Democrats will field the strongest candidates at the top of the tickets in 1986. That includes Evans running for the Senate against Sen. Steve Symms and former governor and U.S. secretary of interior, Cecil D. Andrus, to seek the governorship. Also lending strength because of his incumbency will be Congressman Richard Stallings.

Many potentially strong Democratic candidates did not seek office in 1984 because they thought with good reasons that the Reagan name and ultra conservative tide would bury them. These same

aspirants now may change their thinking for 1986 with an improved Democratic political climate.

Bethine Church, wife of the late U.S. Sen. Frank Church, also has indicated her intentions of running for the Senate. It would appear that she would face an uphill fight against Evans in the primary. At that, it would spark the Democratic primary and enhance the standing of the winner.

Andrus was likely the most popular governor to ever sit in the governor's chair. When he sought re-election for his last term in 1976 against then Lt.-Gov. Jack Murphy, he won every county in the state except Lemhi, which he lost by only a slight margin.

The Democrats fielded a comparatively weak slate of candidates in 1984 except for Stallings. At that, Stallings won the torrid race by a mere 170 votes. And that was likely more because of a swing vote against the controversial Republican Congressman George Hansen, rather than a vote for Stallings. It is now up to Stallings to consolidate his gains for the 1986 elections.

The fact Republicans ramrodded the measure into law with only one short hearing does not sit well with citizens. They believe a fair exposure should have been given to the opposition.

It must be remembered that although lengthy and numerous hearings have been held in past sessions, there are 47 freshmen legislators in this session, more than a third of the 126-members in both bodies.

It is also likely that more hearings may not have change a single vote but it left the Republicans with the stigma of using their overwhelming majority in an arrogant way to throttle the opposition.