

Legislative limelights...

Democrat solons few but appear potent

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Idaho Democratic legislators are the fewest in at least a quarter of a century for the 46th Legislators but that doesn't mean they are not going to be a viable force.

Republicans dominate the Legislators but their numbers are so overwhelming they already are fighting among themselves in the House, and to a lesser extent, in the Senate. They control the Senate 23-12, just one vote shy of veto proof, and the House 56-14, or a total of 79 Republicans and only 26 Democrats, a ratio of 3-1.

These figures are deceiving because most Democrat candidates received approximately 40 percent of the vote on an average except for President Carter, who was drubbed 66.5 to 25.2 percent, an almost 3-1 margin.

However, in the congressional races, the Democrats, although losing, attracted a considerable vote. Sen. Frank Church drew 49 percent of the vote against Steve Symms; Diane Bilyeu 41 percent against Rep. George Hansen, and Glen Nichols 46.3 percent against Larry Craig in the 1st District. The election results generally showed Democrats polled about 40 percent of the vote.

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The Democrats have two new outstanding minority leaders in each chamber who will offer Republicans all they can handle on partisan issues. One is Sen. Ron Twilegar, D-Boise, a brilliant attorney and a past master in parliamentary procedure, who replaces Sen. Cy C. Chase, D-St. Maries, who did not seek re-election. In the House it will be Rep. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, a low key but effective legislator, who ousted the liberal Rep. Patricia McDermott, D-Pocatello.

There is a Republican challenge to the election of Sen. John Peavey, D-Carey, for alleged election irregularities but information uncovered so far indicate this has little substance.

Hammond's elevation to the minority leadership may help the small but tight band of House Democrats as he is a conservative and one who is highly respected by his colleagues on both sides

of the aisle. A couple of years ago, Hammond was voted in a poll among political observers, legislators and newsmen as the House legislator considered with the most integrity and honesty.

His presence likely will be much more effective than that of Miss McDermott, considered by most of her colleagues as the most liberal legislator in the lower chamber. This is hardly a popular label these days in view of the strong conservative tide manifested in the last election. It would follow then that the conservative Hammond likely can work better with the opposition.

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Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt, in a recent news release, warned against Republicans seeking to run roughshod over the Democrats, pointing out they still represented about 40 percent of the voters. He also observed in a somewhat regal air that once the Republicans made their decision, the Democrats might find it difficult if they didn't comply.

Democrat Gov. John V. Evans is well aware of the situation and can be expected to seek greater cooperation among the Republicans. He really doesn't have much choice. His latest statements indicated a strong desire to avoid bitter partisanship.

Evans likely won't encounter much trouble with the Republican House leadership under Speaker Ralph Olmstead, R-Twin Falls, who has demonstrated fairness.

The Senate may be something else where the Senate leaders under Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, R-Soda Spring, have been less than enthusiastic in the last two sessions working with the chief executive. Budge refused to even attend the governor's weekly leadership meetings during the last session.

The Democrats can find their strength far more potent than their numbers indicate by cooperating with the Republican moderates and the traditional conservatives in both chambers. These groups represent the decisive majority as compared with the far right, and the rigid conservatives.