

Olsen¹⁹⁸⁵ guided Idaho GOP for 20 years

(EDITOR'S NOTE: In some editions of Monday's Post-Register, it was incorrectly reported that Dennis M. Olsen, 54, the state Republican party leader who died March 2, 1985, was born June 16, 1934. He was born in 1930. He also was incorrectly referred to as Dennis V. Olsen.)

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political columnist

The death of Dennis M. Olsen Saturday will leave a void in the Idaho Republican Party that will be difficult to fill.

Olsen, party chairman for 7½ years, was the dominant voice in setting guidelines for party policies.

He was not a desk-thumping, loud-mouthed party leader but one who was soft-spoken and persistent.

He was dedicated to the strong conservative philosophy and was eminently successful in guiding the party strongly to the right.

It was more than 20 years ago when Olsen appeared on the political horizon as a budding

young party leader. He was an ultra-conservative at that time but moderated his political stance when right-wingers attempted to oust him as a Young Republican leader.

But through the years, he increasingly swerved back to the right.

There was no mistaking that Olsen was the leading party spokesman and he took the lead

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in raising money for party candidates and answering criticisms directed against himself or the party. He was devoted to party candidates and did everything possible to assure their elections. He even put himself in a controversial position when he defended the embattled Idaho congressman, George Hansen, against charges of filing false campaign financial disclosures, in the 1984 election.

Olsen seldom lost his temper but usually

answered criticisms in a calm, factual way. At party meetings and conventions, he left little doubt he was in full charge.

During his years of leadership, the Republican party has become an increasingly political force.

The Republican numbers in the Legislature have steadily risen, and the GOP now has a 28-14 veto-proof majority in the Senate and an overwhelming 67-17 margin in the House.

Nationally, three of the four members of the Idaho congressional delegation are Republicans.

In addition, Republicans generally hold a 2-1 advantage in county offices.

Olsen kept a close and influential hand in the platforms and resolutions adopted at party conventions the last three bienniums.

He was active in the party's winter meeting Jan. 5 at Boise when the central committee set up conservative legislative recommendations which the Legislature is generally following. These include legislation for right-

to-work, an education funding increase, placing deputy state attorneys under the attorney general, no general tax increases, a candidate-endorsement bill, and reapportionment which eliminates the so-called "floterial" districts.

Olsen was instrumental in bringing President Reagan to Idaho Falls and Bonneville County in the 1980 presidential election.

He also was the moving force behind bringing other Republican presidential candidates and many congressional and national leaders to Idaho and Idaho Falls over the last dozen years.

Despite the abrasive nature of politics, Olsen was always courteous and fair in his dealings with the news media and the public.

Olsen was a stickler for details and especially stressed that campaigns be conducted at the grassroots level. The fact that Republicans hold such an overwhelming superiority in office attests to his success.

In retrospect, it can be said of Olsen's efforts as a party leader, "it was a job well done."

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Tuesday, March 5, 1985

Legislature stands on verge of greatness

By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register staff writer

Most eastern Idaho legislators believe the current session may go down as an outstanding one if a number of pending bills are finally enacted into law.

This appears the consensus after this writer spent most of last week viewing the lawmakers in action.

Already the Legislature has passed one of the most important legislation in a score of years. These are embodied in six bills that deal on the Swan Falls water adjudication rights.

State Sen. Mike Crapo and Rep. M. Reed Hansen, Idaho Falls Republicans, say if the Legislature does not do much more than these measures it will go down as a landmark.

Crapo emphasized the legislation will affect east Idaho farmers more than those in other sections of the state. That's because others are farther away from Swan Falls Dam and probably would feel less adverse impact in case problems should crop up.

Crapo, who as an attorney has specialized in water rights, and Hansen, former chairman of the Idaho Water Resource Board, particularly applaud the \$800,000 appropriation to initially implement the legislation.

One of the key legislative issues now in the session is how much will eventually be allo-

cated to education.

There's a tug-of-war between the ultra conservative bloc which wants no more than \$301.8 million for public education and \$87 million for higher education and those who want several million dollars higher in both categories.

Settlement on this will determine the achievement of this Legislature and how soon it will adjourn.

Such legislators as Hansen, Sens. Ann Rydalch and E.Lee Staker and Reps. Linden B. Bateman, Idaho Falls Republicans, and Rep. John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, want substantially more education funding. Others such as Sens. Mark G.Ricks, R-Rexburg, Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, and Vearl Crystal, R-Lewisville, and Reps. JoAn Wood, R-Rigby, and J.C. Chadbond, R-Idaho Falls, are satisfied with lesser amounts approved by the Joint Finance-Appropriation Committee.

The greatness of a Legislature is also determined by the bills it kills.

Fortunately, the Legislature has thwarted the efforts of Chadbond who appears keen on regressive legislation. The Legislature has rejected Chadbond's bill to permit tax credits to parents of children attending private schools which would have virtually made education optional in the state.

The Legislature also overwhelmingly squashed his bill to transfer the state liquor store to the private sector. Gov. John V. Evans said this would have lost the state \$20 million yearly in revenue, not to mention making liquor drinking easier to buy at grocery stores. He indicated he would have vetoed it.

As a final blow, Chadbond also lost the fight he led to prevent creation of a Department of Commerce, one of the outstanding pieces of legislation.

Other noteworthy bills in the hopper in various stages of consideration include:

- Licensing of day-care centers.
- Hazardous-waste dump siting bill.
- Making fire-fighters aware of hazardous materials and training them how to handle the materials during a fire.
- A three-year override school levy election system to replace the present system of one year only.
- The measure to raise the drinking age from 19 to 21 years of age.

The two top legislative leaders, House Speaker Tom Stivers, R-Twin Falls, and Senate President Pro Tem Jim Risch, R-Boise, appear more interested in having the Legislature adjourn by the end of this week, rather than taking more time to consider pending legislation.

The bill to require corporate quarterly tax could be the so-called "going-home" measure. It would provide \$8.6 million for each of the next two years and probably give enough funding to education to overcome the objections of school supporters.

The enacted Right-to-Work bill and repeal of the Bacon-Davis Act are also two important pieces of legislation but their merits bring mixed reaction.

Right now, the budget would amount to \$583,375,300 as approved by JFAC but the education backers want at least several millions dollars more for each.

Another bill that deserves defeat is one sponsored by rural-oriented Crystal to reduce the 50-50 home tax exemption by half. This would cost the average city dweller at least \$50 a year in property taxes and does not help farmers substantially. It would help businesses and corporations. Evans has indicated he would veto this bill.

Also to the credit of this Legislature was defeat of a lottery bill.

Thus, whether the Legislature will be mediocre, average or outstanding will depend on what it does in these last few days of the session.