

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

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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 effort as a party leader, "it was a job well done."