

The election eye . . .

# Foes believe Hansen is highly vulnerable

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From recent action it appears those who oppose U.S. Rep. George V. Hansen, R-Idaho, believe he may be highly vulnerable for defeat, mostly as result of his two Iranian trips.

The challengers at this time are Jim Jones, Jerome attorney-rancher, who opposed him in the Republican primary in 1978, and two announced Democratic challengers, Diane Bilyeu, a Pocatello woman and former state senator, and C. Kelly Pearce, who sought the nomination in 1976 and who is presently director of the State Law Enforcement Department.

The irrepressible Hansen appears undaunted and still feels he accomplished considerable good by his self-appointed "mission of mercy" to Iran, mostly in an effort to free the 50 American hostages.

He likely accomplished some good in talking to some of the hostages at a time when no one else was able to do so and thus assured anxious Americans in his courageous first trip. His second trip was less spectacular but he apparently had reason to believe he might be able to return with some of the hostages. This did not prove to be the case.

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Of the three prospective opponents, Jones appears at this time to be the most formidable.

In 1978, he was a late entry and waged only a brief campaign of only two months. He only lost the election by about 9,000 votes and carried many of his home Magic Valley counties by decisive margins, some by as much as 2-1. He also led decisively in the Boise area but only a fifth of the Boise area votes are in the Second Congressional District.

Jones is now concentrating on East Idaho, hoping to narrow the margins and thus win the race by expected heavy majorities in the Twin Falls-Burley areas.

Hansen did not conduct much of a 1978 primary campaign and he pointed out with justification that many Democrats

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and independents voted in the Republican primary because of the more interesting gubernatorial race on the state level and also many interesting local races. This included a number in Bonneville County and some other valley counties. These citizens generally voted against him and for Jones.

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Mrs. Bilyeu is a gracious and well-informed civic leader who performed well while serving in the State Senate. She is the wife of State Sen. Chick Bilyeu, Idaho State University drama and speech professor.

She has the disadvantage of little public exposure and it's a matter of record that women candidates for high office have not done well in the male chauvinistic 2nd Congressional District.

If there is as much opposition to Hansen as many claim, she could benefit from this vote if Hansen wins the primary. Certainly she could be considered an acceptable candidate.

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Pearce has earlier responded with an emphatic "no" regarding his interest in such a race but some couple of weeks ago was quoted as saying that if there is enough money and interest he might reconsider.

Pearce's change in position would indicate that perhaps he now could benefit from what he believes is some weakening of Hansen support.

In Idaho, there has never been widespread clamor for any candidate to run, even those who have held offices for long time. It's history that those who want the office must fight for it. Pearce sought the nomination

in 1976, but his campaign was something less than spectacular. He showed a weakness in seeking votes and as a result his Democratic opponent, Stan Kress, handily defeated him. It will be recalled Kress lost the general election to Hansen at that time by only 1,938 votes of 167,000 votes cast.

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Much like Democratic Sen. Frank Church, Hansen doesn't have a wide election margin to work on.

After defeating Jones in the 1978 primary, he drubbed Kress in the second rematch by 20,000 votes in the general election, about 80,000 to 60,000. That's a fairly decisive margin but a switch of little more than 10,000 votes of 140,000 cast could reverse the results.

Hansen has a hard core of supporters of at least 50,000, but there are about that many who also vigorously oppose him. That leaves a swing vote of 30,000 but in a heavy election year such as this year's presidential one, it could reach 60,000.

Jones frankly is banking on an expected large independent vote in the presidential primary May 27 for victory.

It boils down to how much the Iranian trips lost Hansen the independent and moderate support. An Idaho poll showed he lost more than he gained but it wasn't much. Yet, it likely will be one of the key issues of the campaign, along with overall political philosophies. Jones accused Hansen of promoting emotional or "glamor" issues, rather than sticking to bread and butter issues, such as energy, inflation, agricultural, and natural resources.