

The Post-Register The political pulse

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The election eye...

Republican vote tide tremendous in Idaho

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

A deep analysis of the Nov. 4 election results indicate the Republican tide was far greater than most suspected, although signs were pointing increasingly in that direction.

Idaho Republicans are at the zenith of their power in Idaho on the national, state, and to some extent, on the local level. The Idaho Democratic Party is virtually in shambles and needs an extensive surgery job to recover from the election debacle.

The Republicans won all the major state offices at stake and the only Democrats who survived did so on their personal popularity, despite the Republican sweep.

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The Idaho Republican victories were a part of a nationwide conservative trend in which voters showed they wanted to junk many of the liberal policies which have been costly and unproductive in the way of federal grants, regulations and a change of direction to more local control.

Republicans have plenty of reasons for jubilation and the Democrats can't help but feel depressed.

The election results, however, are far from a mandate as many of the more partisan Republicans assert. It is a signal they can have their turn at the bat to see what they can do but if they don't produce, the fruits of victories at this time can turn to the dregs of defeat in 1982 and 1984, make no mistake about that.

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The Republican sweep in Idaho of Congressman Steve Symms over Democrat Frank Church, substantial victories of Congressman George Hansen over Democrat Diane Bilyeu and Larry Craig over Democrat Glen Nichols, the 67-25 per-

cent triumph of Ronald Reagan over President Jimmy Carter, and increasing margins in the Legislature were indeed impressive.

The Republicans hold overwhelming margins in the Legislature of 23-12 in the Senate and 56-14 in the House. In fact, they are so large that the Republicans, particularly in the House, will be scrapping among themselves at an even greater pitch than in the last four sessions: The East Idaho legislation delegates increased to five Republican state senators and 11 state representatives from the previous four state senators and 10 state representatives.

Many county Democrats also lost in the Republican flood, although partisan politics on this level are generally not as acute.

In Bonneville, Democrat Richard Ackerman nosed out Republican Sheriff Blaine Skinner while the retail wine proposal won in a stark reversal to the conservation and Republican trend.

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About the only surprise was the wide margin of Republican victories in some legislative and county races that were thought to be close and the defeat of State Sen. Richard A. Egbert, Teton; and Democrat Rep. Wendell Miller, Idaho Falls, although the Egbert loss was not entirely unexpected.

The lopsided Reagan victory, the tight Church-Symms race, and comfortable triumphs of Hansen and Craig and far-reaching Republican legislative gains were anticipated. Also forecast was the victory of the retail wine proposal and the close sheriff race with the strong indication that Ackerman would win.

It's now time to close ranks and work for the benefit of the nation, state and county, forgetting the acrimony created by the campaign. Planning for future election campaigns can come later.

Legislative limelights . . .

Factional fights loom in Legislature House

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

The Republicans enjoy perhaps the largest top-heavy majorities in the 1981 Idaho Legislature as result of the Nov. 4 general election but it could bring problems.

The happy Republicans enjoy a 23-12 margin in the Senate — one vote shy of veto proof — but an overwhelming bulge of 56-14 in the House.

It would be assumed from this lopsided victories in their favor, the Republicans should have everthing their own way. This may be true in most cases but recent sessions where Republicans have held wide majorities show factional battles have developed.

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The Republican sweep increased their previous margins, from 19-16 to 23-12 in the Senate and from 50-20 to 56-14 in the House. The Republicans have held control of both chambers for 20 years, but the margins haven't been so pronounced. Democrats last held control in the Senate in 1959-60.

In East Idaho, the legislative delegation from the six districts in the 10 East Idaho counties increased the Republican edge from four to five state senators and from 10 to 11 state representatives. Of the six state senators and 12 state representatives, the only Democrats left are Sen. Israel Merrill, Blackfoot, and Rep. Melvin Hammond, Rexburg. Two outstanding Democrats, Sen. Richard A. Egbert, Teton, and Wendell Miller, Idaho Falls, were drowned in the Republican tide.

That graphically illustrates the political story about as well as anything else.

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In the past, House Republicans have engaged in some nasty intra-party squabbles, largely due to their large numbers. The Senate margins have been narrower and this has not been nearly as much of a problem.

This year the pitiful number of only 14 Democrats — possibly the fewest in the Legislature's history — doesn't give them much leverage.

In the past four sessions, some 15-20 moderate Republicans have frequently joined the minority Democrats on some issues. These have been on key appropriation measures, such as the 1 cent state gas tax increase, certificate of need, minimum streamflow, land use, and turning back efforts to emasculate the Office of Energy.

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The 14 Democrats aren't enough this year to become as much of a factor but the impending fights for House leadership portend deep House Republican schisms.

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Instead of two House Republican divisions of the past four sessions, "moderates and conservatives," there could be three the coming year on some issues.

One would roughly be grouped as the moderates headed by such legislators as Reps. Mike Gwartney, Boise; Larry Knigge, Filer, and Tom Boyd Genesee. Then there would be the usual far right faction led by Reps. Gene Winchester, Kuna; Rusty Barlow, Pocatello, and Wendy Ungricht, Boise. A third and perhaps the most dominate would be the conservatives headed by House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, Twin Falls, and the present leadership.

The dividing lines on such factions certainly would be blurred on most issues but it might hold fairly solid in some appropriation measures and on such emotional issues as the Right-to-Work.

In nearly all cases the Democrats likely would align themselves with the moderates, although this could be subject to shifts.

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Most of the East Idaho House Republicans can be classified in the large conservative group, such as Reps. Kurt L. Johnson, and Linden B. Bateman, Idaho Falls; John O. Sessions, Driggs, Darwin Young and Raymond Parks, Blackfoot; and a newcomer, Rich Orme, St. Anthony.

Rep. Elaine Kearns, Idaho Falls, whose compassionate role for health and welfare is well known, generally sides with the moderates.

Past voting records indicate Rep. Ray E. Infanger, Salmon; Gary L. Paxman, Idaho Falls, and at times, Wayne E. Tibbitts, Lorenzo, are viewed on the far right. Infanger's tough role as chairman of the House Appropriation Committee, might restrict his partisan activities the coming biennium.

Campaign statements from the new representative-elect, Martin B. Trillhaase, Idaho Falls, would hint his views are on the far right but this remains to be seen.

In any event, the House Republicans are in full control but the leadership will be hard pressed to keep the troops in line. It could pose some interesting tussles.