Two committees now main campaign issue

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By Ben J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

The roles of the two committees concentrating their fire on U.S. Sen. Frank Church appear to be highlighting the early senatorial campaign, more than a year ahead of the election.

Both committees with nebulous-sounding names, Anybody But Church, and Committee for Positive Change, have become almost as worrisome to the Republicans as it has with Church and the Democrats.

Republicans felt they had an almost 50-50 chance of wresting the seat from Church but the campaign of negativism and distortion waged by the two committees is no help, but rather is backfiring in favor of the embattled senior senator from Idaho.

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This writer nearly two months ago predicted the two committees' actions were the best thing going for Church and that their campaign of deceit would help him. Since that time, other newspapers and political observers have arrived at the same conclusion.

It must be remembered both committees are in the money-making business and Church is the hottest name in Idaho politics. Why these committees seek to distort Church's voting record rather than wage an honest campaign on his political views is a mystery. It also is perplexing that Church is over-reacting and personally answering the committees with vitriolic outburst.

The ABC committee is headed by Don Todd, who performed well as press secretary for former Attorney General Wayne L. Kidwell. However, he conducted a rather discordant campaign as manager for Allan F. Larsen in the 1978 gubernatorial contest when Larsen won a tight Republican primary but was decisively beaten in the general by Democrat Gov. John V. Evans.

The so-called Committee for Positive Action which somewhat belies its name, is chaired by the vivacious Helen Chenoweth. She was executive secretary for the Idaho Republican Party and later worked on the Boise staff office of U.S. Rep. Steve Symms.

Mrs. Chenoweth's political track record is not exactly impressive. She served as Republican state secretary for a time but left in a dispute. She then became a member of Symms staff in Boise but he later fired her. She then joined with an old political warhorse, Vernon Ravenscroft, to form a Boise public relations firm. Her present committee efforts are an offshoot.

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The committees' actions have become so disturbing that the Idaho Republican Central Committee called a meeting a week ago at Boise in connection with the visit of National Republican Chairman William Brock.

They adopted a carefully-written statement which they felt was a compromise to disavow the tactics of the two committees but not to alienate them altogether.

The statement in essence dissociated itself from the committee on grounds it is not permitted by law, anyway. Then as if to soften this approach, took a swing at Church for his criticism of fellow Republican Sen. James A. McClure and other staunch conservative senators, which, of course, has nothing to do with the two committees.

This prompted Idaho Democratic Chairman Wayne Fuller to remark the Republicans missed a golden opportunity to denounce the two committees, adding they cast a cloud over their policy stand by holding most of the discussions in private.

He then said that in his opinion the connections between the antiChurch committees and the formal Republican hierarchy "can't stand the sunshine of public scrutiny."

Not so, hotly replied his Republican counterpart, Dennis M. Olsen, Idaho Falls attorney. He brands the Fuller charges as ridiculous and impugning the "character and integrity" of Republican party officials.

Thus, the campaign has taken a comical twist in that the two committees, rather than Church, have become the main controversial target.

Post-Register/Robert Bower

Controversial committee

HELEN CHENOWETH, left, who heads the Committee for Positive Action, aimed against U.S. Sen. Frank Church, is shown with her public relations associate and a veteran political figure, Vernon F. Ravenscroft. Mrs. Chenoweth heads a committee which, with another committee, Anybody But Church, has now become a political target for its tactics.