The national scene . . .

West observers think Carter is formidable

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The political pulse

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By BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

Incredible as it may appear, President Carter is looked on by most of the Western governors and veteran newsmen and other observers as an odds on favorite for re-election.

From all press reports, low poll rankings, and the criticisms leveled at him constantly, one would believe he would be lucky indeed to finish out the term.

But that's not so.

Most people, including those who are looked on as astute observers, take a deeper look and find that the black overcast placed over Carter has a hidden silver lining.

Some 350 attended the annual Western Governors' Conference nestled near the jagged Sawtooths last week and some 120 were representatives of the news media and 100 observers and guests. Naturally, they all got together and compared notes. One even included a Carter representative who finds his boss chances look good in the west.

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Carter's top administration spokesmen at the conference took some tough blows from the Western governors of which nine of the 12 attending were Democrats. The Democrats were even more vociferous lambasting Carter policy than were the three lonely Republicans; Robert List of Nevada, Jay Hammond of Alaska and Victor Atiyeh, of Oregon.

Particularly on the hot seat were Jack O'Leary, of the Department of Energy; and Dr. Russell Cutler, of the USDA, for bungling policies on gasoline shortages, prices and allocations, and on RARE II recommendations. It was noticeable that while these policies came under heavy fire, there was little direct hostile personal reference to the president himself.

It did show, however, that President Carter had better do some fence repairs if he is to improve his status in the West where in 1976 he lost every state except Hawaii. Right now, it appears he has not improved his standing.

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Yet conversations on Jimmy Carter go something like this:

"Well, it looks like Carter is a dead duck after this term. Look at all the flak he is taking."

"True, but who is going to beat him?"

Long pause, the, "Well, what about Ted Kennedy?"

It's then agreed that the popular Kennedy would hardly challenge an incumbent president and split the party. Besides that, he has repeatedly said he wouldn't run. It would be natural and wise for him to wait for four years.

The talk then turns to the Republicans and even the Republicans here are hopeful but doubtful.

Conversations indicate of the two front runners they believe Ronald Reagan is too old (70) and has too narrow a base on the right while John Connally is viewed as a professional politician with a record of opportunism.

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Most veteran newsmen and observers point out that Carter is indeed under heavy criticism but at least he is trying. His trait for honesty and integrity still remains largely unblemished, a strong point with Americans.

In fact, the present situation is remindful of some 30 years ago when President Harry Truman was under similar stress and most polls showed he was headed for the ashcan at the hands of the Republican Tom Dewey. Even many leading Democrats deserted Truman.

But Truman was a fighter and so is Carter. In fact, Carter faces no formidable antagonist as did Truman against Dewey.

Upshot of conversations generally agree that despite the constant barrages leveled against Carter, the chances look good that he will continue to reside at the White House for another four-year term.