

I.F. election result shows support of present policies

(EDITOR'S NOTE: This introduces a regular column written by Ben J. Plastino, who will fulfill this and other special assignments for The Post-Register following his retirement as political and executive editor of the newspaper. The column will treat sundry topics in Idaho, but with special relevance to Idaho Falls and eastern Idaho.)

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register columnist

The Idaho Falls city election results of last Tuesday were an overwhelming approval of the current city administration and followed predictions almost 100 percent.

As was forecast, incumbents were handily re-elected, with Councilman Sam Sakaguchi leading with 3,385, followed by Wesley W. Deist 3,218, and Councilmen Art Chandler 3,075.

Finishing out of the money were the three challengers: Jesse Schow, retired mailman, 1,343; George Price, businessman, 1,318, and Jeffrey Trunzer, salesman, 633. This was the exact order predicted, except that Schow instead of Price led the challengers by a slim margin of 25 votes. This was apparently due to Schow exerting more campaign effort.

There is little question that Sakaguchi, who led by a wide margin four years ago, lost votes by his absence for a previously scheduled trip to Japan. However, he still had enough to hold first place but by a small margin.

As was forecast, the councilmen were re-elected by more than 2-1 margins despite an extremely light turnout. Voters also showed they don't want youth in responsible positions. As a result Trunzer, who is only 25, trailed badly.

There is disappointment in the fact the vote was the lightest in 30 years, but that's because city residents obviously are deeply satisfied at the way the city ship of state has been sailing. Another reason was the lack of a mayoralty contest.

It's when there is a keen mayoralty contest and strong objections with a city administration, or both, is the voter turnout is heavy.

Few voters

Records show only 4,551, or 23.3 percent of the 19,497 registered, cast ballots Tuesday.

This compared with another light turnout in 1981 when only 5,972

bothered to vote, or 27.4 percent of the 21,550 registered.

In 1983, the vote was light because Mayor Thomas Campbell was unopposed and the three incumbent councilmen — Ralph M. Wood, Melvin L. Erickson and Paul Hovey — had only light opposition from two neophytes, William C. Lattin and Jan Brown.

Ellen Bingham, county election clerk, said the reason for the lower number of registered voters this year than from two years ago is due to many people moving away.

Dipping back into the record of the past four years, the skimpiest vote on record was 30 years ago, when 3,833 cast ballots. In that contest, Mayor E.W. Fanning vanquished Reid Smith, school teacher, 2,409 to 1,424.

In fact, during the past half century city voters have generally approved of the way the city administration has been run.

Exceptions were in 1949, 1959, 1963 and 1965. Aside from that, incumbents who have sought re-elections have been returned to office.

Mayor ousted

In 1949, Councilman Thomas L. Sutton nosed out Mayor Fanning, but two years later Fanning reversed the results by a comfortable margin.

In 1959, a retired Utah-Idaho Sugar Co. Idaho manager unseated Mayor John R. Rogers.

One of the most ironic situations took place in 1963 when Councilman Alex D. Creek was defeated, and in 1965 when Councilman Phil Leahy was ousted. Another councilman, Don Foote, wisely decided not to seek re-election after sampling the mood of voters.

They were beaten because they voted for the city to purchase — without prior announcement and discussion — the present city public works annex formerly housing the Smith-Hart automotive garage, and Sand Creek Park.

It incensed Idaho Falls residents. Yet, it is now apparent it was one of the best buys the city ever made. Both properties, and especially Sand Creek Park, are worth many times the original price.

It's a lesson that in any major undertaking, governmental bodies had better reveal their plans beforehand.