

The election eye . . .

Bonneville to offer close local contests

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Although the presidential and senatorial contests dominate the electioneering, Bonneville County offers a few interesting and apparently tight races on the local level.

The retail wine sales proposal and the contest for sheriff are the only ones on tap on the local level, aside from five legislative races. All could be rather close and certainly none are lopsided, as has been the occasion in many past elections.

Appearance of the wine proposal was only assured on the ballot last week after relentless efforts by the sponsors under J. Kent Just, Idaho Falls businessman and former Greater Idaho Falls Chamber of Commerce executive vice president, so there hasn't been much time for campaigning, particularly by opponents.

The local contest battles also have been waged on a comparatively low-key level.

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By a combination of circumstances, the retail wine proposal and the sheriff's race are intertwined.

The retail sales proposal got on the ballot by getting some 6,500 names. Close to 10,000 people had signed the petitions. A large number of signatures were thrown out because signers were not registered at the time. Since then most have registered. This means that nearly half of the 25,000 or more expected to cast voted have already said they strongly favor the proposal.

The fact there appears to be no widespread opposition to the proposal because of the short time left before the election and because of defused interest on this issue in view of the senatorial and other races it would appear factors favor the wine issue this time.

In 1972 the retail wine proposal attracted 14,862 votes, 8,435 against and 6,427 in favor, or a percentage of 57 to 43 in opposition. A switch of little more than 1,000 votes could have reversed the results.

The opposition was concentrated on this issue in a special election, but the situation is different this year.

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Because of the high interest in the senatorial and presidential contests, a record of more than 27,000 votes is expected to be cast this year. This compares with only 14,862 in 1972 special election, 21,172 in the 1978 general election and the alltime record of 24,685 in the 1976 general election.

Bonneville County Election Clerk Ellen Bingham, this writer and other political observers believe about 28,000 will cast votes Nov. 4. Registration last week was reported at an all time high of 33,227, compared with 32,188 two years ago. Absentee balloting also is at a high levels, with the last report showing 1,098 mailed and 239 walk-ins.

Mrs. Bingham predicts the final registration figure will reach near 35,000 and she anticipates between 80 and 85 percent will vote, meaning about 28,000 will cast ballots for a new record.

In analyzing the factors, it would indicate the wine proposal will carry in the county by

about 60 percent, and it would not be a surprise if it tops this.

Aside from the legislative races which were analyzed in a Sunday column and gave slight edge to all incumbents, the only other local race is for sheriff. It should be a humdinger. Locked in a tight struggle are incumbent Republican Sheriff Blaine Skinner and a veteran city police detective sergeant, Democrat Richard Ackerman.

This contest will not be waged on partisan lines, unlike most of the candidates.

Sheriff Skinner placed himself in the opposition camp by saying the wine proposal would create more law enforcement problems by bringing on increased crime.

His opponent, Ackerman, said he thought the proposal is one for the people to decide for

themselves.

Skinner says wine in grocery sales in grocery stores will increase crime. But state Law Enforcement Director Kelly Pearce says a cursory survey shows no more crime problems in retail wine sale counties than in others. Voters will choose one or the other argument.

Retail wine sales are permitted in 32 of Idaho's 44 counties and Bonneville is the only one of the larger counties in the state that does not permit it. In fact, two thirds of the state store wine sales are in Idaho Falls.

Thus, it is possible if the wine sale proposal passes, Skinner may be defeated, and visa versa. There are also other factors, such as internal dissension among some deputies and his sharply escalating budget which are also issues and could bring ouster of the sheriff.