

The election eye...

Tight contests loom for legislative seats

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Incumbents generally must be favored to win the six contested seats in East Idaho state legislative districts, but nearly all of them look tight.

In two or three cases it would not be surprising to see incumbents ousted. This is important in the statewide battle by Republicans and Democrats for control of the Legislature, particularly in the State Senate. The Republicans hold control in both chambers, 19-16 in the Senate and 50-20 in the House.

In most cases it is a popularity contest based on personal appeal but there are issues that voters should consider when casting their votes.

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Of the six Senate seats and 12 House slots up for grabs Nov. 4, there are contests for four in the Senate and eight in the House. All could be fairly close and at least half of the results could be as narrow as the edge of a piece of paper.

Here's a thumbnail sketch of the legislative races by districts:

District 20, Jefferson, Lemhi, Custer, Lemhi counties: Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby is unopposed but both Republican representatives face challenges, Wayne Tibbitts, Lorenzo, and Ray E. Infanger, Salmon. Tibbitts, a 16-year veteran, is picked by political observers as a decided choice over Wayne L. Olaveson, Menan teacher, but Infanger faces a close contest with young Doug Holm, Roberts farmer, member of a well known political and pioneer family. An Infanger defeat would have statewide impact because his appointment as chairman of the key House Appropriation Committee has attracted controversy by many who feel his views are too extremely conservative and that he can't handle the job.

District 27, most of Bingham County: Sen. Israel Merrill, D-Blackfoot, gets a decided edge but confronts stiff competition from Dean Jones, Blackfoot businessman; while Rep. Raymond G. Parks, R-Blackfoot, is picked as the favorite but also has a brisk race against Democrat Michael N. King, Blackfoot. Rep. Darwin Young, R-Blackfoot, an astute tax authority, is unopposed.

District 28, Madison and Fre-

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Idaho Falls, Idaho, Sunday, October 26, 1980

mont counties: Sen. Mark G. Ricks, R-Rexburg, and Rep. Melvin Hammond, D-Rexburg, are unopposed. One of the most interesting contests is on tap for the other representative post left vacant by Rep. Doyle C. Miner, R-St. Anthony, who moved to Boise. Most view the battle between Rich E. Orme, St. Anthony, Republican, and Democrat John Clarke, former Ricks College president, as a tossup. Clark has the larger Madison vote and better name identity in his favor while Orme holds the advantage of a Republican tide. This may depend on who has exerted the most effort.

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For the first time in several years, Idaho Falls voters will be treated to several interesting legislative races.

Here's the lineup:

District 29, west Bonneville and Butte: Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, and Democrat Charles Amberson, are engaged in a rematch. Williams won by 2,000 votes two years ago but he has done little this year while Amberson has been campaigning intensively. This could be close and an Amberson victory is possible. State Rep. C. Wendell Miller, D-Idaho Falls, now at the height of his popularity as result of his successful pro-nuclear legislation, looks like a comfortable winner over Republican Martin Trillhaase. Rep. Kurt L. Johnson, R-Idaho Falls, is unopposed.

District 30, Central Bonneville and most of city of Idaho Falls and Shelley: Two Republican legislators, Sen. Dane Watkins and Rep. Gary L. Paxman, are locked in tight battles. Watkins is opposed by Democrat Cyril Slansky, retired Idaho Falls scientist, who has conducted a vigorous campaign, while Paxman is challenged by Don Aupperle, retired Idaho Falls music educator. An upset of incumbents in one or both of these races would be no surprise. Rep. Elaine Kearnes, R-Idaho Falls, is unopposed.

District 31, East Bonneville

and Teton county: Sen. Richard A. Egbert, D-Tetonia, although considered one of the top and most effective lawmakers in the state and dean of the legislature, always faces stiff competition and this year is no exception. He is opposed by William Floyd, Idaho Falls businessman, who is a comparative newcomer in the community but who has conducted a brisk campaign. This could go down to the wire.

Both Republican representatives, John O. Sessions, R-Driggs, and Linden B. Bateman, Iona, enjoy no challenges.

A strong Republican tide favors candidates of this party but the Democrats hope to overcome this by dint of hard work and personal popularity. Overall, however, the incumbents hold the edge, although slight in many cases. The wide open representative seat in District 28 is a tossup but if any edge, it would go to Orme.