

Legislative limelights . . .

Democratic caucuses show Carter weakening

Idaho Apr 23 1980

By BEN J. PLASTINO

Post-Register political editor

The Idaho Democratic caucuses last Thursday showed a significant weakening of President Carter, even though he won the state.

His margin of eight of Idaho's 17 national convention delegates for the presidential nomination is hardly one his backers can acclaim. Sen. Ted Kennedy took five, while four are uncommitted.

This result is a startling reversal of what might have taken place, say, a month ago. Most veteran political observers would have said Kennedy would have been lucky to have plucked two delegates.

The deteriorating economy is blamed much on Carter's fiscal policy, and unless this is reversed, the incumbent president could be in serious trouble, not so much from Kennedy but from the Republican contender, who at this time looks like Ronald Reagan.

Even in conservative-bound East Idaho, Carter led only 26 to 18, which is rather amazing. A month or more ago, Kennedy would have been fortunate to have picked up a half dozen votes.

Much of the credit for Kennedy's East Idaho showing must go to the two young coordinators of the Kennedy national staff, Roberto Borboa and David Kayata, both of whom look to be in their 20s. They spent four days in the Idaho Falls area, enlisting the aid of Robert Fanning, Idaho Falls attorney. Kennedy's East Idaho coordinator.

Fanning's efforts were so effective in his own Legislative District 31, that Kennedy beat Carter 5 to 2, with two uncommitted.

The Kennedy field coordinators also had a tremendous impact in Bingham County, where Borboa, a Mexican-American, worked among the minority Hispanics and Indians. That Legislative District 27 also went for Kennedy 7 to 2, with one uncommitted.

In the outlying Legislative Districts of Nos. 20 and 28, where the Kennedy field coordinators did little, Carter won 14 to 2, with three uncommitted.

In the state, Carter won 49 percent of the delegates, Kennedy 29 and 22 were uncommitted.

The uncommitted delegates will be selected at the June 13-14 state convention at Pocatello, since more than 20 percent of the people at the caucuses listed no preference.

The Carter forces spent their time mostly in Doise, thus losing many potential East Idaho delegates.

Idaho's presidential preference primary May 27 is relegated to a popularity contest for the Democrats, although how the votes are divided likely will have a profound effect on the delegates, particularly the uncommitted ones.

The Republicans, however, will base their national convention delegates on the vote results. Seventeen will be selected on the primary results, the other four by the convention. Based on surveys and observations, Reagan will win by a top-heavy margin. In fact, Reagan's presidential primary vote in 1976 in Idaho was the largest, percentagewise, of any state.

At the caucuses it was refreshing to see the Democrats fill a number of vacancies for the Legislature and discuss filling others.

As a result, the legislative committees appointed Cyril Slansky, Idaho Falls scientist, to oppose Sen. Dane Watkins, R-Idaho Falls, in District 30; Larry Hossner, Ashton auctioneer, to challenge Sen. Mark Ricks, R-Rexburg, and former Ricks College president, John Clark, for the vacant state representative position in District 28, Madison and Fremont counties.

In addition, other legislative districts may have other candidates who will run, such as Charles Amberson, retired

Idaho Falls scientist, for a rematch with Sen. J. Marsden Williams, R-Idaho Falls, in District 29; and Max Groom, Rigby businessman, to challenge Sen. Vearl Crystal, R-Rigby, in District 20.

It is understandable the incumbents dislike competition, but it's a healthy situation, which will test whether the voters approve of their performance.

It makes for greater interest and serves the public interest to see contests for all positions.