

The national scene . . .

Carter hike hints he may be tough to beat

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It has been interesting to watch as the predicted rise of President Carter is beginning to unfold.

Any Democrat or Republican who thinks the Georgian is going to be a pushover in the 1980 elections may find a surprise. This is not to say he can't be beat, but when it comes to voting out an elected incumbent president, the American voters have shown a deep reluctance.

Still ahead are the primaries which will test the dozen candidates now in the field, or expected to run. These include Carter, Sen. Ted Kennedy, and California Gov. Jerry Brown on the Democratic side and almost a dozen for the Republicans.

As has been the case in past years, the primaries will force a number of candidates, particularly the challengers on the opposite party — the Republicans in this case — to the sidelines.

This writer observed last winter and spring, when Carter hit low points in polls that the pollsters would begin to do a flipflop as the 1980 election approaches. It is still more than a year away and the so-called political experts are already beginning to change their tune.

Kennedy didn't do nearly as well as expected in Florida, where Carter won the majority of candidates, although the meaning of this appears vague.

In fact, there are many who believe that when it comes to the actual showdown, Kennedy may not announce. This, of course will depend on the primaries, but Carter appears

to have shown keen talent for winning delegates, such as happened in 1976.

Even though there is a movement in Idaho under Rep. Steven Scanlin, D-Caldwell, to form a Kennedy for President Committee in Idaho, most high Democratic leaders back Carter. His conservative image and high moral character would likely easily win him the Democratic nomination in May in Idaho, regardless of other factors.

It was interesting to note that the latest polls show a Carter surge, which gives an indication of things to come.

The ABC-Harris polls last week revealed that Carter, who was trailing Republican Ronald Reagan 50-45 in early September, now is ahead 52-45.

The polls still place Kennedy ahead of Reagan 2-1, but that could be meaningless, since he likely won't be the Democratic nominee, regardless of the national news to the contrary.

Perhaps one of the most significant developments is that the polls show that in the West, where Carter has been the weakest, he now leads Regan by 52-45 percent.

Also last week, the Associated Press-NBC poll showed a shift in Carter's favor. He marked a 5 percent gain, with 24 percent thinking his work is good, 50 percent rating him fair, and only 24 percent poor. Two percent were undecided. However, that huge 50 percent ranking him fair could mean a plus in his favor when pitted against say, Reagan or Connally. Some could say it's a 75 percent rating in his favor, and certainly not against him.

It must be remembered that Carter sits in the White House and he knows how to use political patronage and power.

Maybe Carter won't win reelection, but don't be too sure.

In many ways the Carter situation resembles that of President Harry Truman in 1948. History could repeat.

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