The Post-Register
The political pulse

Idaho Falls, Idaho, Wednesday, October 21, 1981 E-3

The city scene . . .

City elections offer few brisk contests

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Never in recent years has there been such a dearth of contests for the city election, indicating the city administration is strongly entrenched and the municipal voters apparently are satisfied.

Mayor
Tom Campbell

Mayor Thomas V. Campbell is unopposed while the three councilmen incumbents, Melvin L. Erickson, Ralph M. Wood and Paul L. Hovey, are challenged by only two courageous candidates, William C. Lattin, and Jan Brown, Both face a tough uphill battle.

The situation is remarkable at a time when voters are highly sensitive to public issues and are quick to criticize their elected officials. It indicates an unusual support, trust and confidence in the administration.

This is particularly true when compared to Boise and Pocatello where there are sharp fights for mayor and city councilmen.

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The city candidate forum sponsored Oct. 10 by the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women showed few controversial issues. The event was held only four days after the filing deadline, giving scant time for issues to be developed or discussed. Such a forum would have afforded a better background a week or two before the Nov. 3 election.

About the only issues where there was some disagreement were zoning for a neighborhood mall, encouraging more citizen participation, exploring fresh ideas, and perhaps better enforcement of safety codes and other regulations. Certainly there was nothing of any major concern, particularly regarding the important matter of finances.

Mayor Campbell and Hovey, who were the main defenders for the city, showed they have a tight grasp and comprehensive knowledge of city affairs. They responded readily and effectively on the multitipe questions fired at them by the audience.

Not much campaign activity has been noticed so far but Miss Brown, 27, has planned vigorous activity for house-to-house canvassing, 150 yard signs and intensive publicity. She could spring a surprise if the other candidates make no more than token efforts. A better assessment can be gleaned in 10 days.

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Digging back in the records showed the lack of city candidates has no parallel for the coming city election, although it is possible but not probable that a formidable write-in campaign could be launched.

Even in the two occasons in 1965 and 1969 when Mayor S.Eddie Pedersen, had only writein candidates in token opposition, there were lively contests for the City Council. There were six council rivals in 1965 and eight in 1969.

Previous to 1965, there were runoff elections where a mayor and councilmen failed to get a majority in the first election. Those runoffs generated little interest as they were usually between two council candidates. This system was dropped after 1965.

Election Clerk Ellen Bingham reported there appears an unusually high number of city voters registering which is a good sign. Despite this and unless there is an unexpected last minute writein candidate, it is doubtful if the vote this year will top much over 7,000. This is less than a third of the 21,058 registered so far. This would compare with the alltime voting record of 11,218 when Campbell was first elected mayor over four other competitors in 1977, and 7,861 in 1979 when a record field of 14 vied for the three councilmen seats but no mayoralty race.

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Municipal contests appear more enticing in most of the larger cities of east Idaho, but there also are a lack of contests in many others. Incumbent mayors are challenged in Blackfoot, Rexburg, Rigby, Roberts, and Stanley and there also are mayoralty battles at St. Anthony and Aberdeen.

Most of the smaller cities are electing councilmen only and in many cases there are brisk fights in these.

As far as can be observed there appear no dominant issues, the elections largely hinging on personal popularity among the candidates.

Two other interesting special elections are scheduled, one at Rexburg for $98,700 override tax proposal and another at Firth for a renewed 10-year planty facility operation fund.

The city elections furnish some excitement for this year but these are nonpartisan and give little inkling for the major congressional, state, legislative and county contests on tap for the May 26 primary and November general election next year.