

Saturday forum

Idaho candidates answer voters' queries

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Several eastern Idaho legislative candidates at a political forum Saturday vowed to support public education as much as state financing allows.

Fielding questions from the audience, they also said they must examine needs before committing to vote for any tax increases.

Bonneville County candidates said it would be up to the people to determine if they want a county hospital proposal rejuvenated.

Congressional candidates opposed any national tax increases, saying the federal government should live within its income.

Those responses came during a biennial forum Saturday afternoon at Grand Teton Mall sponsored jointly by the League of Women Voters and the American Association of University Women. It attracted an ever-changing crowd of several hundred, estimated Linda Milam, League of Women Voters committee chairwoman.

Republican Congressman George V. Hansen shunted aside questions about his personal finances and court troubles, saying they are part of a conspiracy of his political

opponents and the federal bureaucracy.

Hansen said he would follow President Reagan's program to cut taxes. He scoffed at Walter Mondale's proposal to raise taxes, saying that would increase the average taxpayer's federal income tax by \$157 a year. Instead, he proposed a flat-rate income tax as part of a comprehensive tax reform package.

Hansen vowed he had never missed important votes, adding that he was attending to other essential congressional business if he did miss some congressional and committee votes.

Pete Busch, Lewiston, Democratic nominee for the U.S. Senate, suggested cuts in unnecessary military equipment to help balance the federal budget.

Donald B. Billings, a Boise college professor and Libertarian Party Senate candidate, charged Republican U.S. Sen. James A. McClure "had voted for the biggest tax increase in the history of the United States."

All three congressional candidates called for tax reductions, rather than increases.

McClure and Richard H. Stall-

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ings, Hansen's Democratic opponent, did not attend.

Most of the legislative candidates said they must survey Idaho's financial condition before committing to vote for a one-cent sales tax increase, in case the food sales tax exemption initiative passes in the general election.

They all assured warm support for education, but added that the amount of appropriation they would favor depends on money available.

Appearing were Republicans Mike Crapo, Senators Ann Rydch and Dane Watkins and Democrat Keith Fry for state senator; GOP state representative candidates John O. Sessions, Marilyn Stanger, Linden B. Bateman, J. F. Chadband, Preston Brimhall, M. Reed Hansen

and Gordon C. Linford, Rexburg, and Democrats Charlene McGrath, Charles A. LoPresti, Pete Nielson and Bill Anderson.

E. Lee Staker, a Republican candidate for state senator in District 32, did not attend. GOP candidate Stan Hawkins, Ucon, and Democrat Merrill J. Rose, St. Anthony, state representative candidates for District 33, also failed to attend.

Bateman said a one-cent sales tax hike would raise about \$55 million, adding that much would not be needed to offset the food sales tax exemption estimated to cut about \$15 million in revenue.

Bateman also sharply criticized the Idaho Education Association for mostly endorsing Democratic legislative nominees. He charged the organization has taken soft stands

regarding abortion and homosexuality.

Watkins said he believed a thriving economy would overcome much of the state's financial shortfall.

Watkins and Linford said they support boosting tourism. Linford said he favored a Department of Tourism, but Watkins said he would back only that concept, suggesting instead an enlarged Division of Economic and Community Affairs.

Republican County Commissioner Tom Loertscher, now an independent write-in candidate, and Clifford V. Long, who narrowly defeated Loertscher in the May primary, expressed doubt that a county hospital plan could be accepted. They pointed out that Bonneville County voters had defeated financing such a hospital by more than two to one in a recent election.

Democratic Sheriff Richard J. Ackerman said programs have been started against child molestation and finding new ways to prevent crime. "I am not a politician but only a law enforcement officer," he said.