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Symms, Reagan win in Idaho

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The memorable 1980 Idaho election was dominated by the titular senatorial race between Democrat U.S. Sen. Frank Church and Republican Congressman Steve Symms, attracting a record all-time Idaho vote of 435,000.

Symms won by 4,000 votes in a contest which drew national attention and helped give the Republicans control of the U.S. Senate for the first time in 26 years.

It was perhaps the bitterest and costliest race in Idaho history. Each spent about \$2 million in the campaign and over a total of over \$4 million for a Senate seat that pays a salary of about \$60,000 a year.

East Idaho and Bonneville County were the focal points in the race, as both sides brought in big name politicians to help. It proved important because Symms won the contest by getting a 12,000-vote majority in East Idaho, including 3,000 in Bonneville County. Church had always won a majority of votes in the county in his four contests previously.

Reagan visits

The Republicans paraded the biggest attraction when Ronald Reagan came to Idaho Falls Oct. 14 and spoke to a foot-stomping, cheering record crowd of 5,000 in the spacious Bonneville High School gymnasium. Whether it helped Symms get his victory margin is open to debate, but it certainly didn't hurt.

His appearance attracted everybody that was anybody in the Republican Party in Idaho. Included were U.S. Sen. James McClure, Symms, Congressman George Hansen; State Chairman Dennis Olsen; Lt. Gov. Philip Batt, Secretary of State Pete Cenarusa, Attorney General David Leroy, Senate President Pro Tem Reed Budge, House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, most of the area legislators and many others high in party circles.

Reagan was scheduled to give only a brief 15-minute talk, but it turned out to be a major 40-minute speech. He touched on important points to further water conservation and energy development, and on farm policies.

He bitterly criticized policies of President Carter's administration on nearly all foreign and domestic fronts, vowing he would change them by removing what he called hampering governmental regulations, stopping deficit spending and encouraging productivity.

Reagan underscored the importance of Idaho and the West in improving agricultural, mining and timber production to overcome energy shortages.

He said conservation and development of water resources were vital, not only for the West and for Idaho, but for the nation. He called for development of coal, oil, hydroelectric and geothermal power and natural gas.

More important, he strongly backed the development of nuclear power, mentioning the importance of the Idaho National Engineering Laboratory. He also solidly backed farm policies, promising there would be a partnership between farmers and consumers and inauguration of a coherent farm policy. He said farmers need more voice and ear in government. He promised a 1981 farm bill to make farming profitable.

Senators visit

Also in Idaho Falls in behalf of the Republicans were Sens. Howard Baker, of Tennessee, the Senate minority leader and now to

become the majority leader; Orrin Hatch, of Utah, and Alan K. Simpson, of Wyoming.

The Church forces countered with Sen. Henry Jackson, of Washington State, and Rep. Gunn McKay, of Utah.

Other fringe groups also were on hand, mostly aimed against Church. These included representatives for the Anybody But Church Committee, with a Boise office but based in Virginia; National Conservative Political Action Committee; and Pro-life Political Action Committee, and other radical organizations.

In Church's behalf were the Businessmen for Church Committee, mostly made up of prominent Republicans and headed by Robert Hansberger, well-known Boise business executive.

Both Church and Symms, and their supporters, concentrated much of their campaigning in East Idaho, feeling this would be the pivotal area, and it was.

There were many issues between the two but, the most prominent were: by Church that his seniority and effectiveness in the Senate were vital to Idaho and his support of quality of life and environmental issues; and by Symms that Church's record was too liberal in the matter of government spending, while he represented the staunch conservative approach, and to harvest natural resources on the public lands to provide jobs, rather than establish environment protection areas.

The Republican tide was deeper and wider than most suspect.

In Idaho, the Republicans won all the national, and state races and made sweeping gains in the Idaho Legislature and on the county levels.

It virtually left the Idaho Democratic Party in shambles and in need of drastic surgery to recover from its illness.

The Idaho Republican victories were part of a nationwide conservative trend in which voters showed they wanted to junk many of the liberal policies. Many contend the programs have been too costly and unproductive in the way of federal grants and regulations. A change of direction to more local control was voiced by the voters.

The Republican sweep in Idaho of Symms over Church, incumbent Congressman George Hansen over Democrat Diane Bilyeu, and Larry Craig over Democrat Glenn Nichols for the 1st District congressional seat vacated by Symms, was impressive.

In addition, Reagan won the state over President Jimmy Carter by a whopping 67-25 percent, the second largest margin in the nation, second only to Utah.

The legislative contests also were a disaster for Idaho democrats who believed they had a chance to win at least Idaho Senate control, but instead lost considerable ground.

As a result Republicans hold an overwhelming margin in the Idaho Legislature, 23-12 in the Senate and 56-14 in the House. Previously, the Republicans held control by margins of 19-16 in the Senate and 50-20 in the House.

In fact, the majorities in the House are so large that Republicans are divided into three factions as witnessed by their fight for leadership and committee assignments in the recent reorganization session.

In East Idaho, the legislative delegation increased to five Republican state senators and 11 Republican state representatives from the previous four state senators and 10 state representatives.

In East Idaho, two Democrats considered among the more outstanding legislators were drowned in the Republican tide: Sen.

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Section E

Republican banner year



Post-Register photo

Republican hurrahs

RONALD REAGAN's appearance in Idaho Falls Oct. 14 was the highlight of Idaho's heated political campaign in 1980. He delivered a major policy talk before some 5,000 cheering onlookers in Bonneville High School gymnasium. Raising

their linked hands in a victorious posture preceding the talk, from left, were Congressman Steve Symms, Reagan, Sen. James McClure and Congressman George Hansen.

Richard A. Egbert, Tetonia, dean of the legislature with 30 years service; and Rep. Wendell Miller, Idaho Falls.

The only Democrats remaining in the East Idaho delegation are Sen. Israel Merrill, Blackfoot, and Rep. Melvin Hammond, Rexburg, now the House minority leader.

Wine sales approved

Of local interest and deviating from the trend, a Bonneville wine proposal to permit retail sale of wine in grocery stores and other places handling packaged beer products, and wine by the drink in beer taverns, won by a 55 percent margin.

In this connection, Sheriff Blaine Skinner, who opposed the wine issue, was narrowly defeated for re-election by Democrat Richard Ackerman, one of the few Republican incumbents who lost.

Republicans also were heavy winners in most county races where there were contests, and in fact Merrill was the only Democrat to win a legislative contest in the nine East Idaho counties north of Bingham.

Aside from the highly interesting Bonneville wine proposal, other local proposals include defeat of liquor by the drink at Tetonia, loss of an addition for a Custer County law enforcement funding for jail facilities, but approval for a Jefferson County fire district and for an Island Park fire district funding.

The primary election was a rather dull affair in which Reagan and President Carter were easy winners and there were few primary local contest.

Congressman George Hansen again defeated Jim Jones, Jerome, for the Republican nomination for 2nd District congressman. Nearly all incumbents on the local level turned back challengers. An exception was the defeat of Jefferson County Sheriff Joe Potter by 2-1 margin by a former deputy, Garth Gunderson, who later won the general election.

In the only Bonneville County local contest, Commissioner Tom Loertscher defeated Delmar Anderson for the Republican nomination.