

The Idaho scene

Jordan left rich legacy in calm statesmanship

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The astonishing career of the late U.S. Sen. Len B. Jordan must be remembered for his last term in the Senate when he assumed the role of a statesman.

Jordan was much like U.S. Sen. James R. McClure in that he was a soft-spoken, courteous public servant but they were far apart in the way they performed in the Senate.



Len B. Jordan

Jordan, who died at age 84 on June 30 in Boise, commanded respect from his contemporaries. He appeared at first as an ordinary run of a politician but he rose to great heights in the U.S. Senate, where he performed great service to the people of Idaho and the nation.

He devoted 25 years to public service. He was a member of the Idaho House from 1947-49, governor from 1951-1955, chairman of the International Joint Commission from 1955-57, member of the International Development Advisory Board from 1958-50, and U.S. senator from 1962 to 1973.

Jordan can be best remembered that while serving as a minority member in the 10 years in the Senate of working closely and constructively with former Democrat Sen. Frank Church.

His entry into politics was somewhat an accident. In 1946, angry about the way the Legislature mixed politics and road construc-

tion, he ran for the Idaho House and won.

It was Jordan who established the Idaho Highway Board, which set the precedent for pursuing one of the most efficient state highway programs in the nation, largely free from politics.

His record is sparkled by his incessant fight against the spoils system, whether on national, state or local level.

He successfully fought against the construction of the high Hells Canyon dam but defended other Snake River projects, consistently harping on the theme of using the Snake as a "working river."

He fought for wild and scenic river legislation.

He is remembered also for breaking with the Republican administration and voting against appointment of a questionable Florida jurist to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Jordan's greatness became apparent and gave Idaho clout when he worked closely with Church on Idaho legislation. Each was a power in his own party, giving Idaho a voice in the upper chamber it hasn't had since.

This is attested to by the many valuable pieces of legislation passed in Congress that immensely benefitted Idaho.

Jordan didn't want the high Hells Canyon Dam because he favored water storage dams rather than those used for hydroelectric. Church wanted the area preserved for recreation. Each achieved his aim.

Both served on the Senate Interior Committee, now renamed the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee. The two agreed that a state as small as

Idaho must have a united front. They held to the tenet that nothing would happen in Idaho without their agreement. Each often had to put party matters aside for what they could achieve for Idaho.

After McClure succeeded Jordan it appeared that arrangement would continue. It did for a time with McClure as a member of the minority party, although not in the same friendly vein as before.

But the relationship between Church and McClure worsened, although there was some cooperation between the two for a time on strictly Idaho matters.

Then in 1980, McClure shed the traditional role and took an active part against a fellow Idaho senator, something Church had not ever done against a Idaho Republican Senate colleague. McClure even accused Church as being responsible for the death of a CIA agent in Greece.

The Republican right wingers waged a negative, vicious program, and with the help of a tremendous Reagan-Republican tide, Steve Symms won election by a narrow 4,000-vote margin.

Despite this, McClure is considered virtually unbeatable in 1984. Democrats have so far been unable to field a formidable candidate. Only a newcomer, retired Marine pilot Pat Busch, Lewiston, has said he would be willing to hoist the Democrat banner in the coming Senate campaign.

The passing of Jordan, however, focuses attention to the Idaho congressional delegation, which is known in Washington as one of the most reactionary of any state delegation. A Post-Register columnist, Steve Forester, touched on this very subject in a July 10 column.