

Leroy could end a precedent

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It will be interesting to see how well Lt. Gov. David Leroy does in his quest for the governorship in 1986. No lieutenant governor, aside from Gov. John Evans, has ever won election to the top spot.

But when Evans ran, he already had been elevated to governor and had an incumbent's advantage.

Leroy is one of those "young men in a hurry" and faces probable opposition from Democrat Cecil Andrus, who without doubt has been the Idaho's most popular governor, serving from 1971 to 1976.

Leroy, 37, has rolled up an impressive political record in the short time he has been in the public eye. He was elected attorney general Nov. 7, 1978, and began serving Jan. 1, 1979, at the age of 31, one of the nation's youngest attorney generals.

He served with distinction. But looking for further honors, he was elected comfortably to his present position over Democrat Mike Mitchell, Lewiston, then a prominent state



David Leroy

senator and now a State Board of Education member.

Leroy is a forceful speaker, is well-versed in state government and will represent the Republicans in a formidable fashion.

The Republicans are desperate in seeking to crack the 16-year Democratic stranglehold on the governor's seat. They have steadily increased their margin to 95-31 in the Legislature over the last dozen years, hold a nearly 2-1 advantage in county offices in the 44 counties, and dominated the congressional delegation until Democrat Richard Stallings nosed out Congressman George Hansen last year.

Dating back to the time Idaho became a state in 1890, Evans has been the only former lieutenant governor to win election to the governorship. He did it from an advantageous position, however, because he advanced to the governorship Jan. 24, 1977, after Andrus resigned to accept the U.S. secretary of interior position under President Jimmy Carter. Evans thus ran as governor against Lt. Gov. Phil Batt in 1982 and won by 4,200 votes, despite a strong Republican tide.

Evans does not plan to run for governor again, but has all but formally announced he will seek to oust Republican U.S. Sen. Steve Symms next year.

A lieutenant governor who might have been governor was Republican Jack Murphy, who served two terms. He was strongly favored at the height of his political career in 1966, but was reluctant to oppose Republican Gov. Robert Smylie. It proved to be a fateful decision.

A little-known state senator at the time, Don Samuelson, opposed Smylie in the primary and won the Republican nomination. He then went on to defeat Andrus in the 1966 general election.

Samuelson, however, was lacking in leadership skills and in 1970 Andrus won the election by 11,000 vote.

Murphy decided in 1974 to seek the governorship but it was too little and too late. Andrus won that election by an overwhelming margin, sweeping every one of Idaho's counties except Lemhi. Murphy, a Shoshone lawyer, died about a year ago.

It was in 1945 when a peculiar ploy took place that rightfully irritated Idaho voters. Democrat Gov. Charles C. Gossett appointed himself as U.S. senator Nov. 17 to replace Republican Sen. John A. Thomas, who had died a week earlier. As a result Democrat Lt. Gov. Arnold Williams, who had lived in Idaho Falls, Rexburg and St. Anthony, automatically advanced to the governorship.

In the following year in 1945, both Gossett and Williams were defeated by an angry electorate. Gossett fell to Republican Henry C. Dworshak, who served as U.S. senator for 10 years, while Williams was vanquished by Republican Dr. C.A. Robins, who served one, four-year gubernatorial's term.

The only other time a lieutenant governor became governor was in the first year of statehood in 1890. Republican Gov. George L. Shoup resigned and Republican Lt. Gov. N. B. Willey advanced to the top spot. He served through 1891 and 1892 but then was replaced by Republican Gov. William J. McConnell.

It is interesting to note that although many have tried, no lieutenant governor, state party chairman, House majority leader or Senate president pro tem has ever immediately succeeded to the governorship by election except Evans. Robins was Senate president pro tem in 1943, but was not elected governor until 1947. Republican C. A. Bottolson, an Arco newspaper publisher, was House speaker in 1931, but was not elected governor until 1939 and again in 1943.

In elections since statehood, Republicans have won the governorship 23 times and the Democrats 17 times.