

Evans reaps political hay in 'Capitol for a Day' trips

BY BEN J. PLASTINO
Post-Register political editor

After viewing the political Idaho scene more than 30 years it appears Gov. John V. Evans is setting some kind of a gubernatorial record in appearing before the people.

In his "Capitol for a Day" tour he has set for himself a goal of visiting every one of the 44 counties and at least 250 cities this year. He likes to call this effort as bringing state government to the people, contending rightfully that most people can't afford the time or money to see him in Boise.

Of late, he has virtually saturated east Idaho, perhaps the key area in deciding elections. He was in Idaho Falls last week for two talks, then going to Pocatello for speaking engagements a couple of days. This week has been even more active with the governor holding a series of individual press interviews in Idaho Falls and visiting Madison County Tuesday and then Teton County Wednesday for his "Capitol for a Day" appearances.

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The governor is racking up political points in these statewide "nonpolitical" appearances, long before the intensive campaign begins next year. He said he loves leaving his rather plush executive suite in the Statehouse in Boise and mingling with the people in their homegrounds.

Apparently, he is doing extremely well. He is drawing large and sympathetic crowds nearly every place he goes, building up a high profile among the rank and file of the voters.

In his favor is his down-to-earth homey mein that people like,

lending sympathetic ear to their problems and promising to help solve them. In a soft backhand approach, he takes the opportunity to criticize the Republican legislative leadership for failing to fund what he considers essential state governmental services.

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He is also projecting a conservative image which is such a plus at this time in Idaho, regardless that he is a Democrat who is viewed at least a moderate, and in many circles, a liberal. After somewhat stumbling in office for a couple of years, he is now coming to his own to forge his political future.

Other governors have mingled among the people in off-election years, but not near the extent of the present governor. Cecil D. Andrus traveled frequently and carried a charisma which boosted him to victory by a 70 percent majority over a strong Republican adversary, Lt. Gov. Jack Murphy, in the 1974 election.

Preceding governors, such as Republicans Don Samuelson and Robert E. Smylie, did not go into the field as much but in those earlier days politics was not the high charged game it is today.

Evans is not a powerful speaker, such as Andrus or former U.S. Sen. Frank Church — two of the best in the nation — but he comes across effectively of late with simple, factual phrases the Idaho people understand, much like Sen. Jim McClure. He has discarded his sudden temper outbursts that did not exactly help his image.

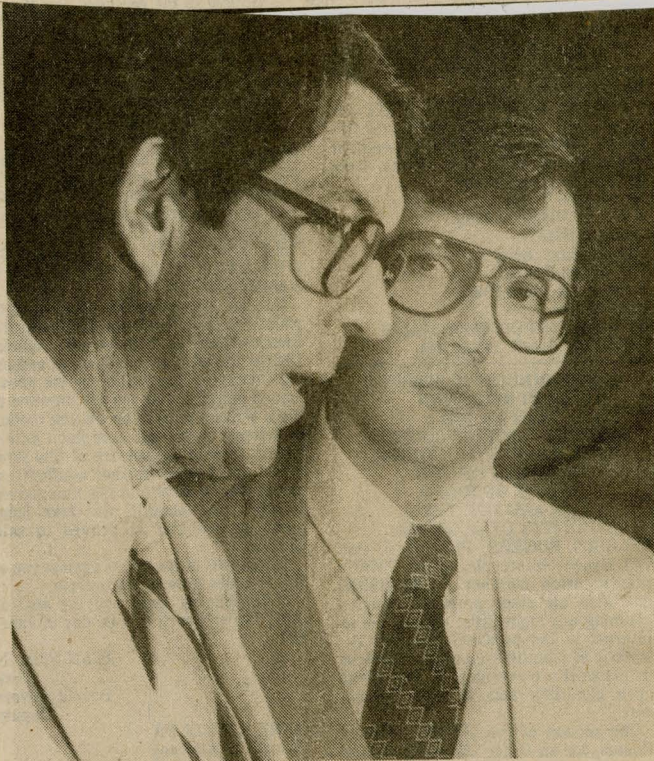
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The Republicans shouldn't make the mistake of thinking that Evans is not going over well. Of the probable Republican gubernatorial candidates, only Lt. Gov. Philip E. Batt recognizes Evans as truly formidable. The other two possibles, Attorney General David H. Leroy, and House Speaker Ralph Olmstead, are inclined to under-rate the Democrat governor. Batt bitterly labels the Evans "Capitol for a Day" junkets as political, which, of course they are, just as is anything the governor does.

For example, when the governor scheduled an informal breakfast in Idaho Falls a week ago, he asked his longtime supporter, John Ohman, Idaho Falls attorney and Bonneville Democrat state committeeman, to invite a couple a dozen businessmen for informal chats and to mainly learn what they want. Ohman did this but the story of his coming appeared in The Post-Register and Ohman was swamped with calls from others who wanted to come. He thus invited some 40 but said it was the limit as the Holiday Inn could only handle that many at that time for a breakfast.

Then at the Rotary Club luncheon that same day, the largest club membership of the season attended, forcing the Westbank waiters to set up two or three extra tables. Now, the Rotary Club, made up primarily of leading businessmen, is strongly Republican which

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Post-Register/Robert Bower

At his best

GOV. JOHN V. EVANS is most effective when chatting with an individual or small groups in his extremely active "Capitol for a Day" tours. Here is shown at left in a recent appearance in Idaho Falls with John Ohman, Idaho Falls attorney and Bonneville County Democratic state committeeman.

should tell something. Evans choose to give a rather unexciting illustrated talk on his recent trip to mainland China with the view of opening markets to that country.

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Evans has other political advantages. He is a banker, rancher and farmer. He is a Stanford graduate. His political experiences have given him the best background of any of his predecessors for his present office. He served as mayor of Malad two terms, member of the Senate 21 years, including Senate minority leader, and then elected lieutenant governor in 1974 before taking the top job in January, 1977, to replace Andrus, who resigned to become secretary of interior. Evans was decisively elected in 1978 over former House Speaker Allan F. Larsen, Blackfoot. He describes himself as a "non active Mormon," which the last election curiously showed that he is readily acceptable to both Mormons and non Mormons.

Evans speaks to students, senior citizens, elected city, county and school officials, and holds his townhall meetings. He has staff members along to jot down notes on what the people want and what he can do.

He is easily accessible to the public and since being in office has kept his front door at the governor's suite open. Since the attempted kidnapping of his son at Burley, however, the back door has been locked for security reasons.

Perhaps Evans' greatest plus is rapidly gaining recognition. Before, he was seldom known, living in the shadow of Andrus. Now, when he comes to a hamlet or city, people's heads turn and know him as the governor in his own rights.