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Bringing back the 'good days'

The return of amiable Democratic Gov. Cecil D. Andrus after a lapse of 10 years has breathed fresh life into state government, just as it did when he first sat in the state executive suite 16 years ago.

He is not the first governor to resume the duties after a break, but he did so after serving four years in the U.S. Department of the Interior, the first Idahoan to ever hold that distinction. Then followed six years in a successful private consulting business based in Boise.

Republican Gov. C. A. Bottolfsen, an Arco weekly newspaper publisher, did the trick earlier but the terms then were only for two years. He held the top state office in 1939-40, was shunted to the sidelines by Democratic Gov. Chase A. Clark, a former Idaho Falls mayor, but returned for another two-year stint in 1943. The governor's office was lengthened to four years in 1947.

Andrus is the 28th governor since Idaho became a state in 1890. The Republicans have won 23 times and the with Democrats winning on 18 occasions. However, because of the four year terms in the past 40 years, Democrats will have held the office longer, 56 years to 54, counting the



Cecil D. Andrus

next four years.

Andrus, who has often said the Idaho governorship "was the best political job I ever had" is now 55. He is a little more gray and a little less hair, and is vastly more wiser but still retains the benevolent image of his earlier days.

He pointed out his varied experience of eight years as senator, six years as governor, four years as U.S. secretary of interior and six years in private business has sharpened his business and political acumen to tackle the tough job ahead.

In 1971, then only 39, Andrus came in as governor on the heels of 24 consecutive years of Republican rule. He now returns following 16 successive years of Democratic supremacy, including six of his own and 10 years from Gov. John V. Evans.

"I've always been in the minority," he said referring to the time he served as state senator and governor.

When he first served as governor in 1971-76, there were five Democratic elective state officers and only two Republicans. It is exactly the reverse now with only the veteran State Auditor Joe R. Williams, now 82, as the other Democrat.

The Idaho Legislature consisted of 19 Republicans and 16 Democrats in the Senate and 42 Republicans and 28 Democrats in the House 16 years ago. Now the Republicans have increased their strength to 26 in the Senate and 64 in the House.

Andrus was 31 when he first ran for the Idaho Senate and lost his first venture for governor to Republican Don Samuelson, a fellow state senator from Bonners Ferry, in 1966. He reversed the results four years later.

Over the years, Andrus has shed much of his liberal ideas and replaced them with what he likes to think is responsible progress.

"In the six years when I was governor we had the highest growth in the state," he said with fond recollection. "We brought increases in the capital income. We appropriated more real dollars in education before or since in the state's history. We decreased the property tax by eliminating the eight-mill county level. We had more people working. Those were the good days."

Now he has changed nearly all of the department heads and he says he has two or three more to go.

He insists contrary to news commentaries that it is nothing new, that all governors have done about the same to get their own team in place to closely follow gubernatorial policies.

Asked why he removed what appeared to be some competent veteran department heads, he replied, "We needed a fresh breeze. So many had been in office so long they got to the point that they were telling the people what to do, forgetting they are servants of the people. It was destructive to the state."

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He said the deficit in 1971 amounted to about 11 million; now it's about \$7 million.

In 1971, he slapped on a 5 percent holdback to liquidate the deficit but this time he dipped into the \$20 million Water Pollution Fund.

He has proposed a record \$662.6 million budget, a 10.3 percent hike from the \$601 million of the current fiscal year ending June 30.

He has established warm relations with all of the top Republicans, hoping this will diffuse the rancor left by the frequent partisan bickerings of the past 10 years.

At the Legislature, there appears a new spirit of cooperation and a bipartisan desire to jointly launch the state for economic recovery.

Andrus insists his relationship with Evans remains excellent. After all, he observed, Evans had ousted most of Andrus appointees although it was over a longer term.

He believes a greater purchase of ethanol which uses farm products and opening new markets at home and abroad will help solve the economic doldrums.

"I believe there is a feeling of confidence among people that will turn this thing around," he concluded with a grin.

(*Ben Plastino is a Post-Register columnist.*)