

**Reflections on Serving under Seven University of Idaho Presidents:  
Representing the University in all its Diversity and Universality.**

Humanities Exploration Lecture

October 18, 2011

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Good afternoon. I want to thank you for being here today. And I also need to give special thanks to Rodney Frey for his work in developing this series of lectures.

One of the results of this series of lectures is to better understand the various interplays in our many interrelationships. So I am going to interlace this lecture with a series of lessons to be learned from my experiences prior to coming to work at the university and then show you the universality of those lessons and how they have applied to my work at the university. They are also universal lessons that can apply to you and others, regardless of where you are employed.

First of all, you need to know that I am an Idaho Democrat, a Seattle Mariners fan during the entire history of its franchise, and a Vandal fan since I saw my first Idaho football game at Neal Stadium in 1957. So my entire life has been filled with lots of hope, but also with minimal expectations. This has prepared me well for life.

I am an Idaho native. I was born in Lewiston. But that was because Clarkston didn't have a hospital in 1943. So at the age of three days, I moved to Clarkston and grew up less than a mile from the Washington-Idaho border.

I joined the Idaho National Guard on my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1960, the beginning of what has become 51 years of Idaho public service. For me it has been a remarkable journey, doing things that I never could have imagined when I was growing up.

*LESSON 1. As a faculty or staff member, you may be in a position to exert a life changing influence on a student.*

I entered the university as a 21 year old freshman in 1964. Dr. Gordon Law was chair of the Department of Communications, where I majored in Radio-TV Broadcasting. In my case, he proved to be a model for the role that a faculty member can play in student success. During my final semester, he asked me to join him for coffee at the house of a friend. The friend was a gentleman named J.R. Inscore, who turned out to be a major democratic political operative in northern Idaho. We had coffee and talked for an hour or so and he finally asked me if I would be interested in going to work for Comp. White was a former congressman who had been defeated by Jim McClure two years earlier. I joined White's staff on June 7, 1968, the day after Robert Kennedy's assassination and began my odyssey through Idaho government and politics.

*LESSON 2. Everyone can be a mentor to someone. Never pass up that opportunity. It can have life-long benefits for the individual being mentored.*

Comp White lost his 1968 election bid. However, within a month of the election, I was offered a position on Senator Frank Church's staff in Washington, DC.

I joined Senator Church's staff and was immediately taken under the wing of his long-time chief of staff, Verda Barnes. Verda had moved to Washington after the election of Franklin Roosevelt. She became a friend of both Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt and has served as an assistant to Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes and Securities and Exchange Commissioner William O. Douglas. Verda became my mentor. I may have earned a bachelor's degree from the U of I, but I went on to earn the equivalent of a PhD from Verda. To this day I have a picture of Verda in my office and when I am faced with some serious challenge I will often look at Verda's picture and ask myself, "What would Verda do."

*LESSON 3. Think strategically. Life is a little like a game of chess. Always try to keep a few moves ahead of the opposition.*

When Cece Andrus was elected Governor, returned from Washington, DC, and joined his staff. I had a wide-range of duties. But my proudest accomplishment of that part of my life came with the national recession of the early 70s. Congress passed the Emergency Employment Act, at the urging of President Nixon. The bill allocated funds to each state to create new public employment opportunities for the unemployed. I was charged with implementing the Act in Idaho. After spending a lot of time pondering how best to make use of those funds, I had an idea.

Andrus had tried, without success, in the previous legislative session to gain approval for a state funded kindergarten program. I suggested to him that we target a major portion of the new federal funds for hiring kindergarten teachers. We could fund the program for one year with federal funds and then seek continuation state funding in the next session of the Legislature.

We established the program, using classroom space in schools, churches, YM and YWCAs, and the like. It was a huge success with the public and the opponents in the Legislature never stood a chance.

*LESSON 4. Never underestimate the importance of serendipity.*

While strategic thinking is extremely important, sometimes you can do great things by just stumbling around.

One night in in the 1970s I was sitting at home when the doorbell rang. I answered it and there was a lady standing there whom I had never seen before. She introduced herself and said she was running as a Republican for the Idaho House of Representatives. I asked her if she needed

any help on her campaign. She appeared momentarily stunned and said I was the first person she had talked to who had offered to help her campaign. So I became her yard sign coordinator.

Her name was Kitty Gurnsey and she won the election. Nearly a decade later I was state budget director and she had become chair of the House Appropriations Committee and co-chair of the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee. I doubt that any state budget director has ever had a better relationship with a JFAC co-chair.

*LESSON 5. Never hesitate to try to figure out ways to make lemonade when handed a barrel of lemons .*

My next professional stop was as executive director of the Association of Idaho Cities. It was the era of the 1% property tax initiative, which meant the need to come up with alternative revenue sources for the cities. Does that sound familiar? From that came the sharing of state sales tax revenues with cities and counties. Also significant increases in other state revenues that are shared with cities, such as highway user fees and liquor dispensary funds. In fact I developed such a reputation for being a state governmental pick-pocket, that one statewide organization that didn't like what I was doing sent out a fund raising letter trying to raise funds to lobby against the work I was doing.

*LESSON 6. The best way to ensure yourself of getting your way in difficult situations, not only the legislature, but in many other places as well, is to form an effective coalition. Coalitions can make the seemingly impossible possible.*

Trying to keep the state budget in balance during this time became all-consuming for me. Tom Stivers was Speaker of the House and Jim Risch was President Pro-Tem of the Senate. And I worked for a Democratic Governor. But we managed to put together coalitions and roll over the top of legislative leadership as we reduced spending and increased taxes.

One day we forced the House to increase the level of funding for public schools above the level approved by JFAC. Rep. Jerry Deckard, the floor leader for those efforts, had a red rosebud placed at the desk of every house member who supported us. The next day each of them had a yellow rose placed at their desks courtesy of the Speaker of the House.

*LESSON 7. While the work of experts can sometimes be improved upon, choosing to ignore their advice can be perilous.*

During the 1980s recession, state revenue projections were a huge challenge, just as they sometimes are today. At the time the state was using a sophisticated econometrics model housed on a large mainframe computer in Cambridge, Mass. But we seemed to be wrong about as often as we were right.

About that time I hired a new chief economist for the state. His name was Mike Ferguson. I asked Mike if he would add two additional elements to making revenues forecasts, in addition to the econometric model. Long-time historical trends and common-sense gut feelings.

I think that we significantly improved the revenue projection process by adding these two elements. Given that, I was amazed last year when both the Governor and Legislature chose to ignore Mike's revenue projections. And now, well into Fiscal Year 2012, they have discovered that Mike's projections were actually correct. Surprise, surprise.

*LESSON 8. Just because you think you are always right, doesn't mean that you actually are always right.*

But there are also times when you make the wrong call. Two such incidents come to mind. In the 1970 I became friends with State Representative Lydia Justice Edwards. One day Lydia came by my office and said she was considering running for State Treasurer and needed my advice. I proceeded to give her my speech on just how useless and meaningless the office of elected state treasurer is. A week later she came by, thanked me for my earlier advice, and said she was running for State Treasurer. She eventually served three terms.

Similarly, one day Cathy Holland Smith came by to see me. I had promoted her from a secretarial position into a budget analyst's position and then, when I left the budget office to take over the planning and administration of the state centennial, I took her along as my fiscal officer. Cathy was interested in applying for a budget analyst position with the Legislature. I discouraged her from applying, for a variety of reasons. But she went ahead and took the position. And today she directs the entire legislative budget staff.

*LESSON 9. You are generally better off following your heart, rather than your pocketbook.. Within reason, of course. Also, know your personal imitations and don't let your ego be your guide in making major decisions.*

I have a passion for public service. But I have also had several opportunities over the years to go after private sector positions that would pay substantially more than I could ever make in the public sector. Joe Parkinson founded Micron Technology. He contacted me in 1986 and asked me to become his corporate controller. I told him that I didn't think I was qualified for the position, since I had never taken a course in accounting and was pretty much self-taught in my budgeting and taxation work for the governor. He begged to differ, but couldn't change my mind. Several years later when then UI president Elisabeth Zinser was dealing with budget issues, she eliminated the Vice President for Advancement position and terminated Harry Peterson, the person in that position. Joe Parkinson pulled her aside at a State Board of Education meeting and told her she had terminated the wrong Peterson.

For nearly three decades, the most influential person in Idaho's Legislature was a staff person. Myron Schlechte was the director of the Legislative Council Office. When he got ready to retire,

he contacted me and asked me if I would go into a partnership with him running a lobbying firm. Between us we probably knew more about state government, had a better institutional memory and knew where more skeletons lay than any two other people in the statehouse. We could have made a lot of money. But I told him that in my heart I was a public servant and could only represent a single employer in the Legislature. And it would have to be an employer whose cause a fully believed in.

*LESSON 10. Keep and value your friendships. And make every effort to make as many friends as you can.*

I haven't yet touched on another important element of success. That is the importance of developing a network of friends and contacts. I have, often unwittingly, been doing this for years. Last year I was in Congressman Mike Simpson's Office. The Congressman commented that he had first met me when, as a thirty year old dentist, he was elected to the Blackfoot city council. After the election I had come to Blackfoot, as the executive director of the Association of Idaho Cities, and conducted a workshop for newly elected city officials.

I have many professional friendships that go back that far. As people move on and up in life, you never know when those old friendships may prove useful. People I've known for 30-40 years include such individuals as Gov. Butch Otter, Sen. Jim Risch, former Sen. Larry Craig, Congressman Mike Simpson, Supreme Court Justice Jim Jones and Secretary of State Ben Ysursa.

Last year President Nellis returned from a meeting of WICHE, the Western Interstate Compact for Higher Education. He said that Dave Longenecker, the director of WICHE, sent his greetings. Dave and I used to double date in Washington DC in the 1960s when I was working on the Hill and he was in graduate school. He went on to serve as Assistant Secretary of Education for post-secondary education during the Clinton administration and then went to WICHE.

*LESSON 11. There are few substitutes for good institutional memory*

Speaking of the usefulness of old friendships, I also need to touch on the importance of institutional memory. I think that a lack of institutional memory within any organization can be nearly as big of a problem as lack of adequate funding. Trial by error leaves a lot to be desired. I regularly get calls or invitations to lunch from state officials and persons involved in non-profit organizations I've been involved in over the years asking to pick my brain and enlighten them about something related to their current activities. Why do they do something the way they currently do it? Or what suggestions do I have for solving a current problem?

When I joined Governor Andrus staff in 1971, he used to complain about the lack of grey hair on his staff. I didn't fully understand his concern at the time, but certainly do now.

I've talked about the lessons I have learned in past jobs. Now let me focus on how I have applied those lessons to working for the University of Idaho.

I have known every UI president back to and including Jess Buchanan. Although Jess was the lobbyist for the Asphalt Institute in Washington, DC, and had been away from the university for about 25 years when I first met him. I have had the pleasure of working as a special assistant for seven presidents -- Elisabeth Zinser, Tom Bell, Bob Hoover, Gary Michael, Tim White, Steven Daly Laursen, and Duane Nellis.

It has given me an insider's view of the university that few have ever had. I have been through some of the university's best times and also through some of its worst times.

*LESSON 1. As a faculty or staff member, you may be in a position to exert a life changing influence on a student.*

Back in the mid-90s, the ASUI selected a student lobbyist who decided to strike out on his own and run with a personal agenda in the Legislature. I received a call one afternoon from a member of JFAC wanting to know if I knew what our student lobbyist was up to. It turned out that he was extremely conservative and had decided that the university should not be funding the Women's Center. He had arranged for a majority of the members of JFAC to support appropriations language that would have reduced the UI's appropriation by the amount it budgeted for the Women's Center, with instructions that the UI no longer fund the Women's Center.

He had worked most of the session on that. But in less than a day I had turned around all of his potential votes. Then I invited him to my office for a meeting. I could have simply demanded that the ASUI recall him back to Moscow. But I decided to spend some time with him and see if I might make him understand that what he had done was unethical. When all was said and done, we forged a good relationship. And several years later he became an important contact for me on the staff of Senator Larry Craig.

*LESSON 2. Everyone can be a mentor to someone. Never pass up that opportunity. It can have life-long benefits for the individual being mentored. Not to mention potential future benefits for yourself.*

I took a lot of pride in the mentoring I did with staff during my years as state budget director. Several of them went on to hold significant positions in state government. Several years ago, when I was in my current position with the university, former employees of mine ended up in positions, all at the same time, that were very important to me and the university. They included state budget director, Brad Foltman, director of the old state budget bureau, Judi Wright, the

chief financial officer for the State Board of Education, Jeff Shinn, and the chief of staff for the Joint Finance Appropriations Committee staff, Cathy Holland-Smith.

*LESSON 3. Think strategically. Life is a little like a game of chess. Always try to keep a few moves ahead of the opposition.*

A case in point is the university's plan to deliver a full three year law program in Boise. We are in partnership with the Supreme Court on an effort known as the Idaho Law Learning Center. During the Capital restoration, the Legislature moved into the old Ada County Courthouse, directly across the street from the Capital. This is a prime piece of real-estate and was sure to be in demand once the Legislature moved back into the Capital. But it also seemed to be a prime facility for the Law Learning Center.

While the Legislature was still housed in the courthouse, I began touching bases with the primary individuals who would be making the decision on the future use of the building. Members of the Permanent Building Fund, the director of the Department of Administration, the administrator of the Division of Public Works, and the Governor. As a result, shortly after the Legislature vacated the building a sign went up identifying the building as the future home of the Idaho Law Learning Center. It will take several years for the state to come up with funding to complete the renovation of the building, but at least we are now the presumed future occupants.

*LESSON 4. Never underestimate the importance of serendipity.*

Several years ago I received a phone call from a congressional staffer in Washington who thought I should be aware that the Washington lobbyist for Idaho State University was seeking an agricultural research earmark for ISU's nuclear accelerator center to do potato testing. The account they were seeking the earmark from is generally only open to agricultural research programs at land grant universities. The ISU lobbyist was aware of this restriction and intended for have the earmark go to the U of I and then passed along to ISU. ISU had never discussed this with the U of I and I contacted the analyst with the appropriations committee who was handling this request and asked that it be turned down. And then I promptly forgot about the incident.

Several months later I was having lunch with the congressional staffer who had first alerted me to this situation. He said that the agricultural research appropriations bill had been approved the previous day. As he was going through the bill, he discovered that because of a committee staffing error, the ISU request had actually ended up in the final bill. I asked to see the language and it turned out that it made no mention of ISU or potatoes. The language broadly referred to funding for research on food safety. And that, as the ISU lobbyist had originally planned, the funding would go to the University of Idaho. He asked me if we wanted to pursue getting these funds and keeping them at the U of I. I told him yes. As a result, we eventually received over \$7 million spread over several years.

This is serendipity at its best.

*LESSON 5. Never hesitate to try to figure out ways to make lemonade when handed a barrel of lemons .*

The days following the collapse of the University Place project were some of the bleakest days in the university's history. A popular president had resigned, many senior staff members had departed, and the university's budget was in complete disarray. But, as interim president Gary Michael said repeatedly, the university's best days lay ahead in the future.

A new president, Tim White came on board. With him came the appointment of numerous new senior members of the administration. From the departure of many from previous administrations came a new cadre of leadership with substantial skills and experience. And from this new leadership, came major efforts to redefine the university through reductions, restructuring, and priority setting. For the first time in a long time, the university stopped trying to be all things to all people and worked on where it could most effectively focus limited financial resources.

As a result of all of this, in many ways the university became a model for the rest of state government when, several years later, the bottom fell out of the economy and all state agencies went through a series of holdbacks. Perhaps the best example of the university leading the way was with health insurance. The university made an extensive effort to involve the entire university community in making major revisions to its medical insurance program. As a result, while the end results may not have received accolades from all of the staff and faculty, at least they were aware of the pending changes and had been given every opportunity to weigh in on them and the changes were accepted by the employees.

*LESSON 6. The best way to ensure yourself of getting your way in difficult situations, not only the legislature, but in many other places as well, is to form an effective coalition. Coalitions can make the seemingly impossible possible.*

After the Commons was completed, the next step was the renovation of the University Classroom Center. Getting the Legislature to support that project was going to be very difficult. So I met with Governor Kempthorne and suggested that he propose a major higher education public works package to the Legislature that would provide a project for each of the state's public colleges and universities using bond financing. He was reluctant. But I told him that I would put together the strategy to make it happen if he would propose it. He relented and recommended it to the Legislature. The Speaker of the House said the proposal was dead on arrival. But I knew the parochialism of the Legislature and Idaho higher education far better than he did.



The package had seven projects, including the Teaching and Learning Center. Nearly every member of the Legislature had a project in the package they were supportive of. But the only way they could get it was to support the entire package.

I put together a coalition, not only of the colleges and universities, but of the contractors, constructions trades unions and local chambers of commerce. Thanks to the work of the coalition, the proposal eventually received overwhelming support in the Legislature – even from the Speaker who said it was dead on arrival.

Most major successes that we have had in the Legislature in recent years, whether it was this construction project or CAES, have come about because of the formation of coalitions.

*LESSON 7. While the work of experts can sometimes be improved upon, choosing to ignore their advice can be perilous.*

I think that one of the most perilous things for an individual is not recognizing what you don't know. I was heavily involved in the early stages of the University Place project in Boise. In fact I am one of the few people left at the university who either had involvement in the project or who will admit to it.

One day at a meeting of all of the major players in the project, the then Financial Vice President presented a spread sheet of revenue projections that would be used to pay debt service on the project bonds. I readily admitted to the group that I knew little about commercial real estate, but I did know how to read cash flow charts. I then proceed to dispute each of the revenue figures and provided my justifications for disputing them.

This resulted in the Financial VP going ballistic and shouting fairly abusive things at me. Later that day I sent an email to President Hoover telling him of the incident. I told him that I was withdrawing from the working group and suggested that he bring in a group of outside individuals knowledgeable of commercial real estate development and have them analyze the project. That never happened and he later told me that he wished he had acted on that recommendation. Later, when I was giving my deposition during the investigation into University Place, I told the investigators about this and said that I had subsequently passed my concerns onto the president during a conversation. One of the investigators said that the information I was providing them was not correct, which immediately raised concerns with me. But then she said that I had not passed the information on in a conversation, I had actually done it with an email. And she passed me a copy of the email.

*LESSON 8. Just because you think you are always right, doesn't mean that you actually are always right.*

I would go back to my previous example of the problems with the University Place project. There were several people involved in this project who were helping to steer it who were

convinced they were doing everything right when, in fact, they had little idea what they were doing. Fortunately, none of those individuals are any longer associated with the university.

*LESSON 9. You are generally better off following your heart, rather than your pocketbook.. Within reason, of course. Also, know your personal imitations and don't let your ego be your guide in making major decisions.*

I have had other job opportunities since I have been with the university. The most amazing was from some individuals who had hired a consultant who put together a strategy paper on how I could be elected to Congress from Idaho's First Congressional District. The truth was that reading through it, I think they were correct. That year I could have been elected. However, getting elected would mean I would have to leave the university and be a Congressman. That wasn't something that interested me. And in today's political climate it might even be considered professionally a step down.

Most recently, I had a representative of a major DC lobbying firm contact me and said that the firm was interested in opening a west coast office and wondered, since I was leaving the UI, would I be willing to go to work for them and run that office. I declined, indicating that if I wanted to continue to work, I would continue to work for the U of I, since it is a cause I fully believe in and a place where I fully enjoy working with all of my various colleagues.

*LESSON 10. Keep and value your friendships. And make every effort to make as many friends as you can.*

Several years ago, as part of our planning for the proposed dairy center, we discovered that the Morrill Act would not allow us to use proceeds from our land endowments for the construction of facilities. Being able to do that was a critical part of that plan for the facility. But this was a federal law that dated back to the Lincoln administration and it impacts every land grant university in the country. The chances of getting all of the land grant universities in the country to agree on amendments to the law seemed remote. And even if we could, that process would take years.

So, working with the Attorney General's office, we came upon a completely different approach that would solve Idaho's problem and not involve any other universities. Rather than amending the Morrill Act, we would amend the 1890 Idaho Admissions Act that made Idaho a state. We would add language to the Admissions Act that said that Idaho didn't need to abide by the restrictions in the Morrill Act that prohibited use of land endowments for construction of facilities. We gave ourselves two years to get that legislation approved.

With two years to get our legislation approved, Clive Strong, the director of the Natural Resources Division of the Attorney General's Office, and I went to Washington to make the rounds of staff members from the Idaho Congressional delegation and the Senate and House Agriculture Committees. After we had finished a series of briefings, we were walking through one of the House office building and happened to walk by the office of the chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. On a whim, I told Clive that I wanted to briefly stop by the office and see if a woman I used to date back in the late 60s still worked there. It turned out she was the executive assistant to the chairman and she came out and gave me a big hug and said she was glad we had stopped by.

I told her about the legislation we were working on and said that a couple of days earlier Congressman Simpson had introduced the bill, HR 3006, and it had been referred to the House Ag Committee and if there was anything she could do to help it through the process, we would appreciate it. And help she did. Thirty-four days after the bill was introduced it was signed into law by President Bush.

So keep and value your friendships and if you are single and stop dating someone, don't just dump them. Remain friends.

*LESSON 11. There are few substitutes for good institutional memory.*

A dozen years ago, we were looking for ways to increase the flow of scholarship money coming to the university. Traditionally this is a university advancement exercise. But looking back to 1986, it occurred to me that a specialty license plate might be a possibility. I had had two very successful specialty license plate proposals approved by the Legislature. The first was the Centennial license plate. The second fed off of that success when I copyrighted the Centennial license plate design on behalf of the Idaho Centennial Foundation and then ran legislation requiring the state to pay the foundation 50-cents for the use of the copyrighted design on each new set of plates issued. Today that copyright has generated over \$5 million, all of which has been assigned to the Idaho Heritage Trust for historic preservation projects.

I sat down with the staff of the SBOE and said that if the SBOE would support the effort, drawing on my experience from the 1980s, I would draft the legislation for college and university license plates and lobby it through the Legislature. They agreed to it and I carried through on my commitment. Since the legislation was approved, the University of Idaho has received about a quarter of a million dollars for scholarships that we would not otherwise have received.

And all it took was jogging my institutional memory on a similar project from years past.

Those are just a few of the personal lessons that I have learned over the years that are in fact universal lessons for everyone. Using Rodney Frey's wheel analogy, I am the hub, these lessons are the spokes, and the rest of the universe is the rim.

Let me close with the immortal words of Michael Stipe, when he announced that his band R.E.M. was going to disband:

“The skill in attending a party is knowing when to leave.”

And with that lesson in mind, on January 20 I will retire.

Thank you for being here today. And now I will be glad to answer any questions.