
Photos by Chuck Scheer

Views from the Top

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Two Idaho governors discuss management of a diverse — and sometimes divisive — state

What does that mean for a governor?

Q.

A.

ANDRUS: You’ve got to be fleet of foot; you’ve got to be nimble enough to understand why people feel that way. You know, the personalities of people don’t change when you move across a county line or a river or a bridge, so we work with one another.

SMYLIE: You have to be constantly on the road, or the next time you turn around, they say, “Who dat?”

What is different about the leadership style that a governor has to adopt in Idaho, compared to other states?

Q.

A.

SMYLIE: I think it’s just a function of distances. I don’t know of any state where you have to go so many miles to do so many things. For instance, the acquisition of an airplane by the state government did nothing except increase the demands on the governor’s time. It didn’t make it easier, just made it worse. You just about have to be their pride and joy. This is about all they have left of a king. The pageantry part of it is the most time consuming and the least rewarding as far as an individual governor is concerned. A rodeo is a rodeo and 16 in one summer is ridiculous.

What is it that unites Idahoans?

Q.
ANDRUS: Oh, I think pride is one; we have a fierce, independent pride in the state of Idaho. But Idahoans have a lot of personal pride and we stick together that way. Our educational institutions and the economy — our tax base — those tie us together, too.

SMYLIE: I don’t know. There will be things from time to time. One of the problems with this Centennial observance is, how do you get something going that can be thought about the same way in Bonners Ferry as it’s thought about 880 miles away in Montpelier? A good deal of the problem arises out of our strange geography, which just happens to be all that was left on the drawing board. I think that conceivably you can make something out of the Centennial, but I don’t know. It’ll be a brave show, but whether or not there will be a residual of state identity, I don’t know.

ANDRUS: Everybody is proud of being 100 years old. They want a big birthday party; every community is going to have their own. Everybody wants to put a candle on the cake. And that will bring us together.

Q. Is Idaho a state that thinks more regionally than it does as a whole?

ANDRUS: Between north and south there’s some regionalism. Part of that is the toponymy; the goat trail that has been our main highway for many, many years has been an impediment. I see us come together when times are good. But when times are bad, times are bad. So, if we can stimulate the economy, then the problems will not seem so large.

Q. How well do you think the various sections of Idaho know and understand each other?

SMYLIE: Not particularly well. The greatest dichotomy is always thought to be north and south. I don’t think it really is. I think it is probably north and southeast. And that’s just a function of distance. It’s further from Bonners Ferry to Montpelier than it is from Portland, Maine, to Atlanta. And it’s pretty hard to establish any community of interest of any substance.

Q. The northern part of Idaho has always felt isolated and ignored by the rest of the state. How can that be handled?

SMYLIE: North Idaho has always been a little like a wealthy widow. They very quickly learn that the definition of enough was more. The northern counties have always felt that there ought to be more transportation between north and south Idaho. The marketplace doesn’t support it. In other words, you can find a lot of traffic on the north-south highway between Boise and Riggins and between Coeur d’Alene and Grangeville. But between Grangeville and Riggins there isn’t very much. The fact that the railroads never made it over that route and the airlines barely did indicates that you’ve got some economic patterns that are built into the system. They are just not going to get broken up very soon. Distribution patterns tend to originate in Spokane and Grangeville and in Boise and Riggins.

Q. Does that mean, then, that we are destined to be a state that really is always going to have this north-south conflict?

SMYLIE: I think it is always going to be a problem. One of the reasons is that we have done some things, like the wilderness concept, that have built fences. There is nothing much that has happened between Riggins and Lewiston simply because all the real estate is gone. There are not going to be any industrial developments up there probably forever, simply because of the fact that we have declared it to be wilderness.

Q. There are some who think that all the good things come to Boise, often at the expense of the rest of the state. Do you agree?

SMYLIE: It is in part true and it is, in my judgment, Boise’s greatest danger. Boise over the years has had a tendency to be tremendously chauvinistic about its relationships with the area and with the state. And mostly to Boise’s detriment. I don’t think there’s any way that you’re going to prevent the centralization of things in Boise anymore than you’re going to prevent the centralization of things in Washington. But I wish that Boise would act like the rest of the Treasure Valley was a part of the scene.

ANDRUS: Once you exceed 100,000 in population, then boom, it feeds on itself and it becomes a magnet. Where is our largest airport? It’s where the most people are. Who uses the airport? Businesses. And it just goes on — that’s normal. But that’s good, because other people get the spin-off of it. The jealousies are a fact of life; it’s been going on for about 150 years in America. So you’ve got to learn to play it.

You take the Micron plant. Do you realize that from the Gowen Road exit where the plant is located, it’s 34 miles down the freeway to Mountain Home? You can drive one way in less than 30 minutes, legally. There are people who like the small town atmosphere, or smaller classroom sizes for their children . . . Mountain Home could promote that very well. I try desperately to promote and bring development to other areas. We’ve been very successful; people accept it.
Do you think that Boise State benefits or loses because of its association with the city?

SMYLIE: I think that people's attitude toward Boise, per se, shakes out on Boise State. No other way. I just don't think there's any escaping the name. There's a lot of history in that. When the Junior College Act was passed in 1932, the Boise powers that be promised the state that Boise State would never happen. And that's no small craw in a lot of throats.

Do you think the institutions of higher education are really the cause of regionalism, or are they really just symbols?

ANDRUS: They're symbols from our past life, but they continue to be significant because there's never enough money to go around. A year ago, we had a good appropriation for higher education and did you notice, there wasn't the intensity that there was this year.

This is a new posture for me, by the way. I think we'd be better off with either a strong chancellor or a one-university system where you took what money you had and said, "OK, now, train and educate these men and women in the following fashion." I think we'd be better off with a reduction in the conflict among our presidents. And the only way to do it is to have a boss over those three presidents that would take them out of the arena and put some single person in the arena.

Gov. Smylie, you feel that competition among those three institutions is healthy. You've even advocated going back to line-item budgeting for each school, rather than a lump sum to the State Board of Education. Wouldn't that fuel the regional fires that burst out once in a while?

SMYLIE: They burst out, but I think that this isn't to say that they are not continually smoldering. . . . no good effect. So why not break the fire out and see what it'll burn? No, we have done some silly things because we let that fire smolder and don't let it burn. I think that competition between our instrumentalities is healthy; it can also be unhealthy. Keeping it healthy is a function of leadership.

Do you think that Spokane doesn't have a great deal of influence over the Panhandle — it does. But the regional strife, I think that was your word, has decreased. Every once in a while somebody gets a little ginned up and brings seceding up again and wants to elect an honorary governor of north Idaho. They hold a mock election, but they're not serious. They used to be serious. In the '60s they were passing petitions to the Congress of the United States to make it a separate state.

SMYLIE: Never did we have any of the back-biting or the bad feeling that seems to become almost part of the scene in the last five or six sessions. What the reason for that is I don't know, except excessive partisanship, I think, on both sides.

Do you think in general that Idaho is a state that works together very well?

SMYLIE: It has to be made to happen. And there are some areas of endeavor where we just probably never will get anything to happen. I think here again that some of this extreme partisanship that we've got going on now is maybe a kind of a last burst of juvenility in the political process. They want to play games instead of run the store.

Essentially, there isn't anything very partisan about any of this junk. Public schools aren't partisan, they're public schools; and universities aren't partisan, they're universities. And potholes are not partisan, they're potholes. The object of the enterprise is to go out and do something about them. And as a matter of fact, there just aren't very many ideological questions that occur in state government. The money question obviously has got ideological overtones . . . how swiftly it moves from one sector to another.

How does our regional make-up compare to other states?

SMYLIE: I think there used to be a fair amount of comparison that could be done between northern and southern California. I don't think that's probably as relevant now as it used to be. Again, distance is a great problem. I think you can find some parallels in Nevada's
**Governors (Continued from page 23)**

experience. Nevada is not developed as a state, simply because Las Vegas and Reno, as two major cities happen to be gambling halls for Los Angeles and San Francisco, and thus, tied in most economic ways to other areas.

ANDRUS: Western and eastern Oregon have got the same problem. Western and eastern Washington, same problem. Northern California vs. southern California. You get below Fresno and they don't even know there's a San Francisco or Humboldt County. I don't think we're any different. We're in better shape in Idaho today than we have ever been at anytime in our history. Everything is going positive for us. We're selling more spuds nationwide. The mines have got some people back working again, that's improving. Some of our commodity prices in agriculture are going up. We've got Micron that's going to build here. We've got Trus Joist going into Twin Falls. We've got Omdarik going in Lewiston. We've got two new businesses, I can't say their names, coming to the Coeur d'Alene area. And we have a new clothing group in the Sandpoint area. There's a plastics plant in Soda Springs. We're doing very, very well. There are 16,314 more people working today than there were a year ago at this time. The average per capita income did increase last year.

Now, we've got some minuses, but we're on a roll. The people feel good about it; I feel good about it. And if you'd give me just six different legislators in each house, I'd be a lot better off. Now, I don't say they all have to be Democrats, but you give me six that think in a positive vein, and we'll really light a fire to its tail.

**Q. What is an Idahoan?**

ANDRUS: A very independent person, but is seldom in doubt. They love to have the ability to recreate; whether or not they do it in the great outdoors, they don't want anybody telling them how to do it. They're just now moving into what we would call semi-sophistication on an international basis. But an Idahoan is, like I say, an independent person, but warm, compassionate, friendly. Western in nature, always willing to help somebody who truly is in need through no fault of their own, but they wouldn't give a plug nickel for a bum.

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**Territorial Instincts (Continued from page 27)**

D-Pocatello.

Keiser: "Urban life is different than rural life. People in Boise have certain cosmopolitan interests and backgrounds that not only tend to be different from, but offensive to, some people in other parts of the state.

"There seems to be an attitude that the money and privilege that is focused here is in some way sinful . . . and there's a good deal of resentment about that."

What may cause some resentment toward Boise is the urban-rural gap that seems to be widening in Idaho. Like many other states before it, Idaho could be undergoing a transformation from a predominantly rural society to an urban one.

"Society is changing," says Brown. "Unfortunately, as the big cities grow, they will become supercompetitors with anybody else around. By virtue of our lack of ability to compete, we'll become less able to compete.

"Boise in and of itself isn't trying to create it, but it will appear to people that way," he adds.

Keiser agrees: "Urbanization is a relatively new phenomenon in Idaho, and therefore the effect is going to be felt a little more strongly. To stand in the way of change that is inevitable could cause a rough period," he says.

Will sectionalism ever end . . . or even abate? Efforts like the Centennial celebration and the push for economic development have the potential to bring all sections of Idaho together for the common good.

On most issues legislators put aside their regional interests when the good of the whole state is at stake, according to Boyd.

"People stop just short of forgetting that we are a state and remember at the last vestige of time that we better get together. It seems like everybody checks up at about the last second," he laughs.

"I don't think it [sectionalism] is as bad as people think it is. As a whole, we rise above it. Overall, we take a look at what's beneficial to everybody," agrees Neibaur.

"It's not that somebody is trying to get somebody else," adds Brown. "It's just the way things fall out socially and geographically. If we understand that, we can move past our barriers to communication."

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But others say there is no end in sight to the deep differences that divide us.

"I don't see any short-term resolution to sectionalism," says Moncrief. "It's something you have to live with as a part of politics in Idaho. Any resolution would require a couple of things — one is some substantial migration pattern changes to alter the mix of cultures that you find in different parts of the state. The other is a general move toward a different economic base in all parts of the state."

With such diversity within the state's boundaries, it isn't easy to define what it means to be an Idahoan. Aside from the state government structure, there isn't much we have in common.

Perhaps the simple fact that Idaho is home is enough for most people.

Says Bilieau, "We love the concept of Idaho — that it's a freewheeling type of individual who loves to live in Idaho. We have an affinity for the outdoors, and that brings us together."

Keiser agrees. "I think the dominant feature in this state is land and natural resources. If there is anything that Idahoans have got to be able to rally behind, it's the natural beauty that they have the good fortune to be supervisors over," he says.

"The recognition of that can be an awfully strong unifying factor — maybe stronger than anything else."

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