



Guest column: Master politician, better man

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By Chuck Malloy

Cecil D. Andrus was one of the greatest political minds I've ever met, but more than anything else, he was a good man, writes Chuck Malloy.

Early in my political-reporting career some 30 years ago with the Post Register in Idaho Falls, I learned an important lesson from then-Gov. Cecil Andrus. That was, never make a wager on the outcome of a political race with a master politician.

I don't remember what we were betting on at the time, but I do know that I lost. And I paid up one night at the old Idanha Hotel in Boise, and at one of the most exclusive restaurants in town.

"Malloy, you know you're in trouble when the only wine they have is imported," Andrus said at one point. I ended up covering for Andrus and his press secretary, Marc Johnson.

I was never so happy to lose a wager. It was a political reporter's dream come true – a chance to break bread with the governor, share a few laughs and have conversations about politics and life in general.

Of course, we were not strangers. During those days, it was humanly possible for a reporter to arrange a one-on-one interview with the governor or member of Congress, either in person or by phone. To old-school political people such as Andrus, allowing media access was part of the job.

Many things have been said, and will be said, about his accomplishments in the wake of his recent death. He was a champion for education and conservation and gained notoriety for standing up to the feds in the effort to keep nuclear waste out of the state. Was he the greatest ever? Maybe so. From my standpoint, he was the most personable governor I've seen as well as the most politically savvy. He figured out how to get his way much of the time with a heavy Republican majority in the Legislature, and fellow Democrats knew better than to cross him.

During my time as an editorial writer with the Idaho Statesman, I had a chance to play golf with Andrus and former Gov. Phil Batt – a golf round that was loaded with humorous column fodder. There were differences between the two in style and substance, but their friendship and respect for one another was genuine. And both were horrible golfers.

But that didn't stop Andrus' love for the game. One day, I saw him walking out of a newly-opened golf store in Boise and asked a question, "What is a guy like you doing at a place like this?"

His response: "What are you doing here?"

Well-deserved accolades for Andrus will be pouring in for some time, and even some longtime rivals will be paying their respects.

“Governor Andrus was one of the most accomplished, successful and masterful political figures I have worked with. He had the judgment and strength to take matters where he wanted them to go,” said Sen. Jim Risch, who as a Republican leader in the state Senate often clashed with Andrus over policy issues.

But Andrus’ life was not all about political accomplishments. He was a good man, and I wish there were more like him in the political world.

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