

# "There is no serious argument..."

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Chris Carlson, The Carlson Chronicle

Let's get back to facts and forget informed opinion in the discussion that has arisen of late around just who is Idaho's greatest governor.

Out of deep respect for the good, great former governor of Idaho, I bit my tongue during Cecil Andrus' disavowal of my book's title during the opening of the Nov. 10 Boise City Club forum. His modesty is sincere. His sense of history though is flawed. The vast majority in the audience, as well as across this state, concur with the assessment expressed by the title as do most other serious students of Idaho history.

Even at the age of 80 the zeal and skill with which Andrus skewered the Idaho Republican party for harboring scoff-laws like tax-dodging, state timber stealing Rep. Phil Hart of Coeur d'Alene, drunk-driving and car stealing Sen. John McGee of Caldwell, borrowing-his-association's-funds party chairman Norm Semanko of Eagle, to ridiculing Tom Luna's replace-teachers-with-a-computer phony educational reform was a thing of beauty to behold.

He brought the house down with zinger after zinger, speaking candidly, forcefully and passionately. His ability to use a memorable phrase, such as my "wood butcher" friends, referring to Idaho's timber industry, charmed the sold out forum. He added he could call the industry that because they knew he'd grown up in the "slab, sliver and knothole" business. When he finished his near 55-minute performance he received a standing ovation from the almost 400 standing room only guests.

According to moderator Marty Peterson, who has attended most Forums since it was founded in 1994, it was the first standing ovation he'd ever seen at the conclusion of anyone's presentation. Governor Andrus virtually made my case.

There can be no serious argument. With the possible exception of Governor Dr. C.A. Robins (1947 to 1951), no other governor, not even three-term governor Robert E. Smylie, has come close to achieving the record of enacting policies and legislation which has had a more beneficial impact on the lives of all Idahoans. From the funding of kindergartens to the adoption of local land-use planning, to the consolidation of various state agencies, to appointment to boards and commission, to property tax relief for senior citizens, to increased support for higher education, to instilling a deep sense of pride in the person representing the state, no other governor has a record that begins to match that of Governor Andrus.

Spokesman-Review blog writer Dave Oliviera, who covers better than most issues of import to the inland northwest, asked his thousands of readers recently to respond to the

question of who was the greatest. Over 600 responses quickly flowed in and it was no contest. Over two thirds said Andrus. That was 66 percent of the respondents. Phil Batt, no doubt a good governor (but great?), ran second with 5 percent.

Overlay this record as governor with what Andrus accomplished for Idaho when Secretary of the Interior. Idahoans have not forgotten the establishment of the Birds of Prey, the expansion of the Nez Perce National Historic Park, the reforms to grazing practices in the passage of the BLM Organic Act, the adoption of amendments to the 1902 Reclamation Act.

The list goes on of actions that benefited Idaho specifically not to mention Idahoan interest in the protection of the crown jewels of Alaska, the establishment of urban national parks, the designation of new wild and scenic rivers, and more.

Governor Smylie's son, Steve, rose to defend his father's legitimate claim to such a title, and rightfully so for during his three consecutive terms (1955 to 1967) he did accomplish much, but not as much as Andrus. By the end of his 12-year tenure Smylie had so alienated many friends and supporters with an arrogance no one would ever accuse Andrus of having that Republican primary voters rejected Smylie's bid for a fourth term and nominated a virtually unknown state senator from Sandpoint, Don Samuelson, to be their 1966 standard-bearer.

The book demonstrates through stories, anecdotes and observations that Andrus is arguably as a matter of objective record, the greatest governor Idaho has ever produced and for all time will ever produce.

Marty Peterson and Randy Stapilus are compiling a book due out next year naming the 50 most influential people in Idaho history. I'll wager anyone a box of my apples that their examination of the record of any would be pretenders will in the end lead them to the inevitable conclusion that not only is Cecil Andrus the greatest governor in Idaho history, he is also the most dominating and influential person to ever have called this great state home.

A native of Kellogg, a former teacher at Kootenai, and a former journalist, Chris Carlson served as press secretary to former Idaho Governor Cecil D. Andrus for ten years. He is the founding partner of the Gallatin Group, is now retired and he and his wife, Marcia, reside at Medimont.