

Former House Speaker Boyd dies at 86

Long-serving Genesee Republican remembered as a 'peacemaker' and fair and effective legislative leader

William L. Spence/Lewiston Tribune

Former Republican Speaker of the Idaho House Tom Boyd of Genesee died Monday at the age of 86.

Described as a "peacemaker" and "consensus-builder" who was respected by members of both parties, Boyd represented Latah County for eight terms in the Idaho Legislature, from 1977-92. He spent the last six years as speaker - at the time, becoming just the fourth lawmaker since statehood to serve three terms in the House's top leadership position.

"I met a lot of good legislators during my time in Boise, but I only met a few great ones and Tom was one of those," said Mike Mitchell, a Democrat who represented Lewiston and Nez Perce County for 18 years, including six terms in the Idaho Senate from 1971-82.

"Tom was very likable and very effective," Mitchell said. "He was fair to everyone. I don't think the House ever had a leader like him."

Boyd farmed wheat and peas in the Genesee area and was active in the community, serving on various professional and local boards - including the Genesee School Board for 13 years - before running for state office.

"I just knew of him as one of those people who are really effective in their jobs," said Dean Ferguson, communications director for the Idaho Democratic Party and a former political reporter for the Lewiston Tribune.

"I went to high school in Genesee and knew the Boyds were well-regarded as great community members," he said. As a legislator, "he managed to lead in a way that was fair and respected. Nobody ever questioned his integrity. You always understood he put the interests of his constituents ahead of the politics."

In addition to his leadership responsibilities, Boyd served two years on the House Education Committee and eight years on the Legislature's joint budget committee.

"He was almost accused of being too far left at times, but he was very good at getting people together," said William Haxton, a Genesee farmer who was treasurer for seven of Boyd's eight election campaigns. "It seems like he could get people from the far right and far left to do things that needed to be done. He understood how to make things work."

Prior to Boyd, the last House speaker to come from north central Idaho, Elvon Hampton, was also a Genesee native. He served one term from 1957-58. There hasn't been another speaker from northern Idaho since Boyd retired.

"People here were pretty proud of him," Haxton said. "It wasn't that he gained a lot for Genesee, but just the idea that the speaker came from our little community."

Boyd chose not to run for re-election in '92, saying after 16 years in Boise he wanted to see what the Genesee farm looked like in winter. He reportedly considered running for governor, but never filed for office. However, he was appointed to the State Board of Education in 1998, and served three years before retiring again.

"He was always a strong supporter of public and higher education," said Tom Trail, himself a staunch education advocate during his 16 years in the House. "He encouraged me to run for office, and I spent a lot of time having coffee with him. He was one of the last speakers to represent mainstream Republican positions."

In announcing Boyd's state board appointment, then-Gov. Phil Batt noted that "everyone who knows Tom has great respect for his abilities as a consensus-builder, for his knowledge of how state government works and for his statewide perspective."

Short's Funeral Chapel in Moscow is in charge of the funeral arrangements.