

# The Return of the Natural

**Chris Carlson/Carlson Chronicle**

At an age when most men of means are sitting on a beach somewhere soaking up the sun's therapeutic rays, or in a box seat watching their beloved Rockies (Cubs, Giants, Mariners) at spring training in Arizona, former Idaho Attorney General and Lt. Governor David Leroy, 69, is planning on a return to public service.

If elected Idaho for sure will be the beneficiary, and even the nation.

After a term as the state's chief legal officer, and one as Lt. Governor, the Lewiston native and University of Idaho undergraduate (and Idaho Law School graduate), at the time a rising Republican star, decided to take on former Idaho Governor and Interior Secretary Cecil Andrus. Most observers thought Andrus would easily walk to a third term, not recognizing how tough a comeback can be for anyone seeking a return to the governorship after a ten-year absence.

It was the closest gubernatorial race in years. Leroy lost by just 3300 votes. He could have demanded a recount but instead graciously accepted the outcome. He then took a policy position as the nation's Nuclear Waste negotiator before returning to the private sector to become a successful attorney.

Public service though is in his blood. In 1994 he sought to win the seat he is seeking now, but lost the GOP primary to his former campaign manager, Helen Chenoweth. For Leroy public service is a calling for which he is well-suited. He runs for the right reasons, not as a gratifying exercise in ego.

He runs because he sees himself as a problem solver. He is particularly intrigued by Republican control of both houses of Congress, of the White House with Donald Trump as POTUS, and, a 5-4 conservative majority on the Supreme Court. He sees opportunity for principled members of Congress to get past harsh partisanship and gridlock.

He calls himself a constitutional conservative, has deep admiration for President Abraham Lincoln (He has become a true Lincoln scholar) and sees

himself as a uniter not a divider. He is no hide-bound ideologue. Rather, he applies his intellect and thoughtfulness to issues demanding solutions.

He will bring to the table maturity, experience, sound judgment and a sense of history. Some may say his time has past, but he can point to a president today in his 70's and the three major Democratic challengers in the 2016 election would have been 70 or older by inauguration day (Hillary Clinton, Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders). Seventy has truly become the new 45.

Leroy has also been a long-time admirer of former Idaho Governor and U.S. Senator Len B. Jordan, a true principled conservative Republican if there ever existed one in Idaho.

By announcing within a couple days of the current incumbent, Raul Labrador, signaling his intention to run for governor in 2018, Leroy is hoping to pre-empt the field. He quietly started planning his bid months ago, banking on Labrador not seeking re-election to Congress.

He has tied down loyalists across the district and should have no trouble financing his bid. He expects a challenger, someone like young GOP 4<sup>th</sup> District State Representative Luke Malek. A sleeper could be First District State Representative Heather Scott. Leroy should win regardless of who challenges him either from within the GOP or the Democrats.

Leroy has another attribute that does well by him---a sense of humor. In September of 1989 in what was a fortuitously clear, cloudless day with no wind, I climbed Mt. Borah. At 12,662 feet it is Idaho's highest and the second highest, after Mr. Rainier, in the Pacific northwest. I carried with me an Andrus bumper sticker which I slapped onto a plastic tube at the top in which folks that make the climb can leave notes and messages.

I had a message I wanted to deliver to David Leroy who in the 1986 race had made much of his youth and vitality in a not too subtle contrast between Andrus' age and his. Knowing that Leroy was thinking of a rematch I took an educated guess that if I left a message for him in the tube someone would read and report it to him within several weeks.

My message read: "By Chris Carlson, done on behalf of his friend, Governor Cecil D. Andrus, as a message to David Leroy. There are thousands like me who will climb any mountain and do whatever it takes to

return the champion to the ring for another term. You better think long and hard before seeking a rematch.”

Three weeks later he called saying he understood I’d left a message for him on top of Mt. Borah. We shared a good laugh and not coincidentally was there a rematch. Ironically, the roles are reversed today, but the message is the same. A veteran who knows politics is going to be tough to beat. A political natural has returned.