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Lasting Leadership
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An accomplished politician, Governor Daniel J. Evans was able to make lasting political and social contributions to Washington State and left a precedent for leadership that any politician would strive to achieve. Though at the onset of the seminar “Dan Evans: A Legacy of Public Leadership in the Northwest” I was skeptical that he could be so admired “by both Republicans and Democrats” as was often expressed, I now am not surprised that this distinction arose. Governor Evans did not “play” politics, he did his job: serving the people of Washington. If he felt that something was necessary, he would say so and work at achieving it, no matter the potential political cost. Of the many issues and areas that Governor Evans was involved, I was particularly impressed with the way he took on environmental issues. His bold and visionary actions in this area can be used as an example of the style of leadership he employed as Governor.

Governor Evans’ attitude of putting what is right for the people first was what most impressed me when studying his environmental accomplishments. Though, as he pointed out in his address to the Washington Environmental Council in 1969, the environment was a popular political issue of the time, Dan Evans took the fashionable theme of the “environment” and tied it to politically risky issues such as transportation. In his speech, he called on the Council to actively inform the state government about the effects of new transportation systems on the environment. Empowering the environmental community could have made many businesses feel isolated, a somewhat risky political move as he was a Republican governor in a heavily Democratic state. However, he felt it was absolutely necessary to allow the environmental community a strong voice so gave them the right to be heard he felt they deserved and should use.
Pressuring the environmental community to offer their input is just the sort of multi-party cooperation that Dan Evans desired in his government. Governor Evans seemed to truly value the opinions of others and placed a high priority on making informed decisions stemming from discussion. This was the case when he worked on the Alternatives for Washington, a statewide health-planning project. He stated “[the future] can be determined by all the people of this state if they are willing to take the time and devote the effort to the task”. Though this type of rhetoric is common among politicians, Governor Evans followed through with it by implementing open meetings and mail surveys. Dan Evans was thus able to lead an effort to discuss and find solutions to issues the public was concerned about. From the environment to social services to development, a comprehensive list of values made - made with the voice of the people.

In *Leadership for the Common Good*, Crosby and Bryson contend that “the essential requirements of policy entrepreneurship are a systematic understanding of policy change and a focus on enacting the common good.” The efforts of Dan Evans confronting environmental issues show how he more than satisfies these requirements. Dan Evans was able to support his strong desire to enact the common good with his keen understanding of what it takes to create policy change.

This can be seen in the events leading up to the creation of the Alpine Lakes wilderness area. In 1976, a bill was sent to President Ford that included designating the Alpine Lakes a wilderness area. The US Forest Service was opposed to this measure and was trying to pressure the president to veto the bill. Dan Evans used his “15 minutes” with the president to show him a Mountaineers book about the area. Had he failed, there could have been a backlash in Washington State as the residents could have either doubted his ability to connect with a president from his own party or felt he should have used his “15 minutes” to get an agenda that
had a better chance of acquiring presidential support. However, Governor Evans knew what it would take to achieve policy change and his belief that he was doing the right thing brought him to use his time to talk to the president about the Alpine Lakes. Governor Evans knew what it would take to convince the president of his opinions. And as it was risky to use such a rare opportunity to talk the President one-on-one about such a controversial topic, this event also showed that Governor Evans was not afraid to risk his political capital as long as he felt what he was doing was in the best interest for the state. As he said in his 1969 speech to the Washington Environmental council, “I personally will place the full weight and the full prestige of the Governor’s office behind [making progress in the environmental area].” In the end, President Ford signed the bill despite the strong opposition from the Agricultural secretary from his own administration.

In today’s highly partisan political world, it is easy to brand someone as either a Democrat or Republican. Dan Evans’ values, however, seem to be broader than a single label. He looked to the people and worked to do what was best for the issues they faced. As he noted in his address to the Washington Environmental Council, “There is room and there ought to be room for Republicans and Democrats alike to join together in issues that ought not to divide. For clean air is certainly no province of just one political party, although hot air seems to be a province of both.” Dan Evans was able to have a vision for the future and recognize that it isn’t a political party that is going to implement it; it is the people and government working together for the good of the people, and only the good of the people.