A Legacy of Public Leadership – Governor Daniel J. Evans

Throughout the Legacy of Public Leadership series, diverse and charismatic individuals offered insightful reflections about Governor Daniel J. Evans’ career in public leadership. These individuals consistently mentioned aspects of Governor Evans’ leadership that could be deemed imperative to the success of a given public figure. As future leaders strive to create dynamic change and opportunity for the betterment of society, the example of one man’s life offers an enormous tool to guide political, academic, and public success. Governor Evans was not only a visionary leader during his political tenure, but continues to offer guidance and support to any project he is involved with today. Paramount to his success, the Governor’s legacy can be attributed to visionary policies, steadfast leadership and sound political ethics.

In the book entitled Leadership of the Common Good, Barbara Crosby and John Bryson describe three types of leadership styles in a shared-power world: visionary, political, and ethical leadership. Concerning visionary leadership they state, “Visionary leaders help constituents grasp the “reality” of a problem by highlighting consequences that flow from behavior that is based on existing dominant frames, and they propose new frames that entail behavior and action that can be expected to help remedy the problem.”

A common tool Governor Evans cited as imperative to the success of new and innovative

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programs he envisioned was “setting the agenda.” By understanding the necessity to develop public and legislative support for his initiatives, Governor Evans realized the importance of ensuring that ample time and energy be given to his policies. In 1969, as the political and social desire for an agency that would tackled environmental issues within Washington State was growing, diverse environmental and political constituents came together to filter out the most pressing topics concerning the Northwest environment. Under the Governor’s request, these individuals narrowed their focus to effectively “set the agenda” at a special legislative session, eventually leading to the creation of the nation’s first Department of Ecology and a precursor to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Governor Evans also possessed an innate ability to motivate both citizens and politicians through his steadfast leadership. In his 1965 Inaugural Address, the newly elected Governor stated, “Today’s problems require fresh, positive solutions … Let us, therefore, each of us as citizens, as legislators, and as members of a new administration dedicate ourselves to the task which lie ahead in a new spirit and confidence and a new trust between people and their government.” In several sessions, Governor Evans was praised for his ability to “reach across the aisle” to politicians in both parties and bridge political gaps that would have otherwise hindered legislative initiatives. Likewise, through projects like the “Alternatives for Washington,” Governor Evans motivated the citizens of Washington to participate in future development of their state through his leadership. Evans stated, “Our future need be imposed neither by the personal interest of an elite nor the impersonal force of history. It can be determined by all the people of this

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state if they are willing to take the time and devote the effort to the task. All who participate can have a voice and all who have a voice can help decide where the state will go and what it will be." As Ms. Lee Minto, one of the public members and delegates to the AFW Project, explained, being involved in such an innovative process was both "exciting" and taken "very seriously" by all citizens involved because of the Governor’s leadership. Governor Evans dedication to Washington State motivated both citizens and politicians to improve the society they not only lived in, but also would leave for future generations.

Another noteworthy quality that Governor Evans was praised repeatedly for possessing was his unwavering ethical stance. Donald Horowitz, former legal advisor to Governor Evans, stated, “Dan had an incredible reputation for ethics in Government [and that quality] is what made his leadership.” Throughout the tumultuous time period of the 1970s, Governor Evans handled issues concerning the Civil Rights Movement, the Vietnam War, and the economic crisis following the “Boeing Bust.” By simply listening to citizens’ needs, the Governor was able to effectively implement initiatives, such as DSHS, an agency created to alleviate economic and social struggles formed by diverse societal problems. Judge Horowitz also noted, “Leadership [is characterized by] a person or group that sets a particular tone for society.” Whether it was through television

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addresses, scrutiny over the budget, or simply talking on a personal level to citizens, Governor Evans continuously “set a tone” the upheld his ethical values in public policy.

Throughout several sessions, Governor Evans attributed his love for the Pacific Northwest to his experience growing up and experiencing the beauty the area had to offer as a young Boy Scout and avid hiker. His dedications to preserving Washington’s beauty and to helping those who are in tremendous need of assistance continue to drive many of his most lasting legacies. In a 1969 speech to the Washington Environmental Council, Governor Evans summarized what he foresaw as the desired objective in public policy. Concerning the need for an agency to ensure the preservation of clean air and a sustainable environment, Governor Evans stated, “There is room and there ought to be room for Republicans and Democrats alike to join together in issues that ought not to divide…This is an opportunity to diminish if we can, partisan differences…to join everyone together, citizen and legislator alike to prove that here in Washington State at least, we can do a real job.”

Governor Daniel Evans is truly a role model for any individual desiring to enter a career in public service. His honesty, candor, and determination have aided in the development of an environmentally sound and socially progressive state. As Washington’s policies on politics, education, and economics continue to change, Governor Evans’ lasting legacy of leadership will continue to influence future generations. Hopefully others will recognize the need for such visionary and ethical leadership as they strive to create their own legacies.

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