Leadership Beyond Party
(JT)

Growing up, my major formative political images were of the 60’s and Vietnam. I grew up with images of Kennedy’s call to public service, Dr. King on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, and Nixon’s Watergate. For me, these images were the starting point for ideas of politics and party, and all things going forward are measured to that.

Former US House Speaker Tip O’Neill from Massachusetts is often quoted as saying “All politics is local”. While this is a good description of the outward effectiveness or implementation of politics, I believe the corollary to this is that “All politics is personal”. Our references of family and community help frame our world in political terms.

One of Governor Evans’ earliest memories is of him at seven years old helping his mother host a Herbert Hoover for President election night party in 1932. His family discussions over dinner helped define his political interests. As a Boy Scout in the Pacific Northwest, he developed a desire for conservation, which appeared in the policies of the Republican Party.

Politics and parties move forward and evolve over time. Republicans will never again be the party of Lincoln just as certainly as Democrats will never again be the party of FDR. The political viewpoints of the country change, as they also should of the political parties. Coalitions are formed and reformed, causing certain political policies of a party to completely change, or appear to swap completely with another party.
Regardless of how these parties change over time, we likely remain loyal to the early political snapshots that we develop. Political loyalty doesn’t say “I no longer support environmental policies because my party no longer does”, but “Our party must renew our focus on environmental issues.”

Early in his career Dan Evans began working across the political aisle. He formed a coalition in 1963 to elect a Democratic house leader, William S. Day, a Democrat willing to work with Republicans on the imminent redistricting in Washington State. He has at times gained the disapproval of his Republican colleagues by leading and legislating based upon his personal beliefs and bucking the party line. His political ideals have even created the label of a “Dan Evans Republican”. This tendency to follow his personal political compass is summed up in this comment from his 1973 inaugural address as Governor: "I would rather cross the aisle than cross the people."

Some of the best examples of political success come when members of one political party find success with a constituency that identifies heavily with another political party. Two examples of this are Senator Lincoln Chafee of Rhode Island and New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg; both Republicans with constituencies dominated by Democrats. In these situations, a member of the minority political party has little chance of succeeding without a willingness to work with the majority party the ability to add sincere personal truth to the job at hand.

With fierce independence comes the faith from the people that the legislator is making decisions not for reasons of party influence, but rather personal direction. By moving out of the safety of the party to take a controversial stance or appeal to another level of reasoning, we gain insight as to where the politician’s motivations lie. Even if we
don’t agree with his or her stance on a particular issue, we have some faith that these decisions are made with integrity and consideration.

Political descriptions of Washington State often refer to the makeup of the urban Democratic east in conflict with the rural Republican west. In an appeal to Republicans in 1993 Dan Evans states that “Until we build a philosophy which attracts not only the farmers of Eastern Washington, the loggers of the Olympic Peninsula, the suburbanites of Puget Sound, and also the urban dwellers of our major cities, we have little hope of governing regularly.” This philosophy is very different from what we often see today. Too often politicians try to edge out a majority with divisiveness, and sacrifice bipartisan cooperation and consideration for their constituency as a whole.

We face the same issues across the U.S. The last two Presidential races have been the closest in years, with one being the closest in history. The politics of the day appeal to the desire to scratch and bite for every vote in a winner take all result.

Governor Evans did not leave us with this kind of legacy. Find a Democrat that worked with the Governor and often he or she will tell you, “Dan Evans is the only Republican that I ever voted for”. The remarkable thing is that the majority of the times that I’ve heard this quote it is preceded by the introduction “You hear all the time Democrats say that…” It’s a testament to the man that people not only state this and believe it, but that people seem to feel that it is universal enough that they just need to remind others of it to make the point.

The politics of our day reflect our views, which have become increasingly anti-politician. Maybe our expectations of those that serve us have fallen, and we are increasing bombarded by people running for office as outsiders non-politicians. Governor
Evans stated that “Those who run for office claiming or pretending not to be politicians are deluded, misinformed or charlatans.” To participate in our civic duties, either as citizens or public service, we cannot accept the view that service is a social ill, but restore the dignity and respect that such service deserves and needs. We cannot accept the rantings of the snake-oil salesman that tells us all the things that are wrong with us, and attempt to sell us an easy cure. True leadership attempts to unite people around a common cause. In a state such as Washington, leadership needs to help bridge the two sides of the state and political viewpoints.

For me a test of the salesman, or anyone in public service should not be whether the sale can be made, but whether that person would be welcomed back the next time they came into town. Governor Evans has continually been invited back by the people of Washington, as legislator, as Governor, as President of the Evergreen State College, as Senator, and as an example for a new generation of public servants. Ultimately, any public servant should be measured against the trust that they engender with those that they work with and for. This can be measured with a quote in 1994 by then director of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition, Janet Wainwright. Referring to the Governor’s legacy on environmental issues, she states, "I would buy anything he's selling. He's a believable person."