

McKeithen's future cloudy as mansion stay nears end

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BATON ROUGE—In little more than a week Gov. John J. McKeithen steps down after two successive terms in office—a feat unmatched in modern Louisiana history—to a future that is filled with considerable uncertainty.

His administration, like those of many predecessors, was marked with considerable achievements and considerable failure.

He goes out of office on the heels of a political campaign that was generally run on the theme of who could best clean up corruption in state government.

He goes out of office with a vow not to assume another post until his chief aide, W. W. McDougall, is exonerated of the charge against him. He was accused by a federal grand jury of making a false declaration in connection with testimony concerning disbursement of commissions on state insurance.

Major investigation

McKeithen goes out of office in the midst of a major investigation into the conduct of his office concerning insurance and commissions. He has called his own investigation in counterpoint to the federal inquiry.

He goes out of office with a major scandal developing over the purchase of books by the Education Department, and an inquiry into it by another federal grand jury.

With the eight years coming to an end May 9, things don't look too bright for him.

But it wasn't always that way during these two terms.

McKeithen swept into office in 1964 over a tough challenge by one of the most respected Republican challengers in decades after winning two rugged primary campaigns.

He came in as a virtual unknown quantity, but with considerable skepticism on the part of many because of his long association with the Earl Long faction.

He entered office after running a racist campaign in the second primary against the liberal New Orleans Mayor Chep Morrison.

Picking up the pieces

But almost immediately McKeithen began picking up the pieces and avowed he wanted most to bring the state together. He enlisted the help of his opponents. He brought his GOP opponents and his conservative opponents and his liberal opponents together into his administration.

Even Morrison came aboard before his untimely death. It was the death of Morrison that created a political vacuum in the state and McKeithen readily filled it.

He tuned in the good government people and turned them to his use.

He backed reform legislation—pushing through a code of ethics that saw only one

vote against it. He created an industrial-inducement program that brought results unheard of in the state before.

Ran high

For the first three years of his administration McKeithen ran so high in public esteem that he easily put through the second-term amendment and then followed through

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with a smashing first primary victory over weak challengers and no general election opposition.

But even as he ran high, the gale warnings were rising.

The industrial boom that brought prosperity and industrialization up and down the Mississippi River also brought with its complex problems. One of these was a shortage of labor that fed the flames of labor-management difficulties eventually leading to a shutdown of industrial expansion in the Baton Rouge area and bad publicity nationwide.

Life articles

At every turn allegations of wrongdoing, unethical conduct and corruption in government began to crop up.

The Life magazine article on criminal influence on state government may have been overstating the case that the whole of Louisiana was controlled by it, but the revelations that followed were enough to shatter public confidence in government.

Into the mire

The scandal that evolved out of the Louisiana Loan and Thrift Corp. failure dragged McKeithen into the mire. No matter how much he protested that he only wanted what was right, it became lost in the fact that he gave the go-ahead at all. Further, after numerous denials on his part and that of his close aides it was finally shown that McKeithen's campaign had received a total of \$10,000 from LL&T.

McKeithen was often loyal to friends when it would get him into trouble. He issued pardons to Sen. Jack Fruge and to Dist. Atty. Sam Cashio so they could continue practicing law and holding public office despite convictions of criminal offenses.

He wanted very much to help New Orleans regain its stature as a leading city in the South and port in the nation. He did much for the city, particularly the Dome Stadium and for the port.

In race relations, McKeithen built a record of "keeping the lid on" but did not do much more than tokenism in bringing blacks into state government. He did get along well with blacks and brought in aides who were able to quench several prospective racial problems.