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WILLIAM EDGAR BORAH
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A native of Illinois who became an attorney in Kansas, William E. Borah sought his fortune farther west. Within a few months after he settled in Boise in the fall of 1890, he rose to a position of community leadership. By February 15, 1892, he had become Republican state chairman. Responding to his guidance, Idaho's Republicans suddenly departed from their traditional radical anti-Mormonism in time to focus upon national issues in Idaho's initial presidential campaign that fall. When, by declining to endorse silver in 1896, the national Republican party ruined any prospects of success in Idaho, Borah ran for congress as a Silver Republican. Losing to a Populist-Democratic Republican candidate, he returned to the Republican fold by 1900.

He organized a progressive Republican election victory in 1902, but a conservative Republican combine managed to deny him election to the United States Senate. From then on, he regularly battled against the party organization but refrained, after his Silver Republican experience in 1896, from leaving the party.

In 1906, he led the Republicans to another Idaho victory, this time with the party committed in advance to his election to the United States Senate. By now, he had a decidedly successful law practice; immediately after his election to the senate, he gained a national reputation as an attorney for the state in an unsuccessful prosecution of William D. Haywood, who was charged with conspiracy in the assassination of a former governor, Frank Steunenberg. Numbering important corporations among his clients, Borah showed his independence by upholding the cause of organized labor and consistently opposing business monopoly.

In the United States Senate, he continued to enhance his national reputation through his exceptional oratorical skills. As senate sponsor for two progressive constitutional amendments--direct election of United States senators and the federal income tax--as well as for creating the children's bureau and finally the United States Department of Labor, he strongly supported president Theodore Roosevelt. But when Roosevelt left the Republican party, Borah simply took a neutral position in the presidential election of 1912. Overwhelmingly returned to the senate that year, Borah continued to show his independence during World War I, firmly supporting civil liberties at a time when freedom of speech certainly wasn't very popular. He strongly endorsed an excess profits tax and upheld the Wilson administration against party obstructionism in conducting the war. Wilson, in turn, privately endorsed Borah's candidacy for reelection to the Senate in 1918, but that did not deter Borah

from leading the fight against ratification of the Versailles Treaty in 1919.

With his interest turning increasingly to international issues after 1919, Borah continued to oppose the 1919 Paris treaties as dangerously unjust. He regarded the League of Nations simply as a device to maintain an unjust peace, and disparaged the World Court as an instrument of the League. He championed unpopular causes, such as recognition of Russia, along with popular ones, such as arms limitations. As chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations from 1924 to 1933, he had an influential voice in the campaign for renunciation of war. Unlike the isolationists, he felt that the United States should pursue an active, independent, international policy for revision of the Paris treaties in order to promote world peace. In domestic matters, he was too independent to join the farm bloc in 1921, but he worked for some pretty liberal measures to aid the farmer during the hard times that afflicted agriculture while the rest of the nation prospered. He also led the Republican senate insurgents in a close fight against the Hawley-Smoot tariff in 1930, and in 1932 he did not support Herbert Hoover for reelection as president.

During the New Deal, he endorsed some important measures (such as banking reform, monetary adjustment for gold and silver, and social security) and criticized others, including the National Industrial Recovery Act, which violated his anti-monopoly principles. His bold opposition to some major features of the New Deal made him a leading presidential contender early in 1936. But fortunately he was spared that nomination. Instead, Idaho returned him to the Senate for a sixth term that year by a vote exceeding Franklin D. Roosevelt's state presidential total. During his final Senate term, he quietly, effectively, worked to defeat Roosevelt's proposal to enlarge (and hopefully, to reform) the United States Supreme Court. He also continued to support measures to keep the United States out of European wars that he had warned against so often.

He lived to witness the collapse of the Paris treaties with Hitler's expansion in Czechoslovakia and Poland in 1938 and 1939, but he did not survive long enough to see the unexpected defeat of France in 1940.

Even though he regarded his position in the senate as national rather than local, he was able, through his exceptional prestige, to serve Idaho as well as the nation. Major reclamation projects expedited the state's economic development, and before the end of his first term, construction began on the world's highest dam just above his home town. Other projects followed, and Idaho benefited substantially from having an international celebrity serving so many terms in the United States Senate.

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