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Expansion of governmental services and responsibilities, particularly for farm development and agricultural improvement, assisted Idaho greatly after 1900. Part of a national progressive program, this trend in public administration was timed superbly for Idaho's continued development. Late nineteenth century promoters and engineers were able to provide broad and well-designed plans for major irrigation projects west of some important Mormon cooperative canal developments that were transforming vast desert stretches into productive farmland. Their projects proved to be more ambitious than anything they could finance and develop. After federal legislation provided for government assisted projects under state supervision (1894) and federal management (1902), some of these large canal systems became feasible. Major canals around Twin Falls were arranged for in 1900, and two large federal reclamation projects--Boise and Minidoka--followed four years later. Twin Falls started as a sage brush townsite in 1904, and a number of other new communities followed quickly in that area. Boise valley and other southwestern Idaho canal systems were enlarged to serve vast tracts that private canal companies had been unable to reach. A number of misfortunes and delays attended project development in a number of areas, but farming in southern Idaho took on a new dimension not long after 1900. By that time, most northern Idaho farm lands were developed and brought into production.

Because of its strong Populist and Silver Republican tradition and a progressive Democratic administration as late as

1902, Idaho was receptive to progressive legislative proposals that gained currency nationally after 1900. William E. Borah led a progressive Republican campaign to success against Fred T. Dubois' progressive Democratic canvass in 1902, and President Theodore Roosevelt's Idaho supporters fared well until a conservative legislative combine succeeded in blocking Borah's election as a United States senator. Dubois then managed to distract Idaho's electorate from more significant national issues with a sustained anti-Mormon campaign from 1904 to 1908. Dubois was progressive even on conservation issues, which few other Idaho politicians were reckless enough to advocate. His anti-Mormon program, which had succeeded very well from 1884 to 1892, had no chance for success after 1904. After the issue was disposed of permanently in 1908, Idaho was in a position to adopt direct primary and local-option legislation in 1909 and initiative, referendum, and recall provisions in 1912. Borah gained national prominence in 1907 as a special prosecutor of William D. Haywood (a leading IWW founder and Western Federation of Miners secretary) for conspiracy to assassinate former governor Frank Steunenberg two years earlier. He became United States Senate sponsor of important progressive measures, such as constitutional amendments authorizing a federal income tax and direct election of United States senators.

Idaho's progressives failed to elect a Republican candidate for governor by an extremely narrow margin in 1912, but a progressive Democratic administration came to power under Governor Moses Alexander in 1914. After serving two terms, Alexander finally lost control of his party to a still more progressive, if not Socialist, farmers' combine that revolutionized Idaho politics in 1918.

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