

ROY WHO? ATTORNEY QUIETLY BECOMES A POWER BROKER

Mar 11, 1999 - By Dan Popkey - THE IDAHO STATESMAN

When the University of Idaho football team needed help after a post-game fracas in downtown Boise, they turned to him.

When homeowners on Warm Springs Avenue sought relief from traffic problems, they sought his aid.

When Rep. Pat Bieter and his wife were killed in a car crash, he made the arrangements.

And when clients like Boise Cascade, Amalgamated Sugar, Saint Alphonsus Regional Medical Center, The Idaho Statesman and consumer-owned electric companies need help at the Legislature, they call the same guy.

Boise lawyer Roy Eiguren has quietly become one of the most powerful men in Idaho, despite never having sought elective office.

"He's a fixer," said Secretary of State Pete Cenarrusa, an old friend. "And he's just invaluable."

"He gets things done," said House Speaker Bruce Newcomb, a close friend. "And you know you can trust him."

Since joining the politically active Givens Pursley law firm in 1993, Eiguren, 47, has become one of a handful of elite lobbyists.

He's a master at bringing competing interests together and forcing consensus, something legislators appreciate even more than his clients.

"I've been watching him," said Bill Roden, a 70-year-old former senator who has long been considered the best lobbyist in the Capitol. "He's coming along really well."

Eiguren is a charming, genuine, smart man who wins friends everywhere he goes. He's also extraordinarily well-connected.

He and his wife, Miren, and their two kids live in former Gov. Bob Smylie's old house on Locust Street. Eiguren went steady with now-First Lady Pat Kempthorne at the U of I, where Eiguren was student body president. His late father, Joe, was the pioneer of Basque language education in Idaho.

He was Peter Johnson's top aide at the Bonneville Power Administration. He's been finance chairman of the Idaho Republican Party. He's held posts in the campaigns of Sens. Larry Craig and Mike Crapo and GOP presidential nominees Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and Bob Dole.

"He knows the art of the legislative process," said Johnson, whom Eiguren calls a friend and mentor. "Roy has this ability to see the whole picture, like a captain from a crow's nest overlooking the ship."

But Eiguren hasn't sought elective or appointive office because he wanted to raise kids and make money. He was urged to consider appointment to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission by former Sen. Jim McClure, now a partner in his law firm, but decided against seeking the job.

Now that the children are 14 and 17, Eiguren candidly admits he's got a dream job in mind: He'd like to be ambassador to Spain.

He's supporting Texas Gov. George W. Bush for president and getting ready should Bush win. In January, Eiguren was appointed Spain's "honorary consul" to Idaho. This summer, he's taking the family to Spain for six weeks, including two weeks of intensive language training.

"He's got a great resume," said Johnson. "And Idaho would be mighty proud."

Eiguren also could land a top job in a GOP-run Department of Energy. But if Democrats keep the White House, look for him to make the leap and run for attorney general in 2002, positioning himself to succeed Gov. Dirk Kempthorne in 2006.