

Our Views

Nice job, Gov. Atiyeh

When Gov. Vic Atiyeh leaves office Jan. 12, after having served a pair of four-year terms as the state's top elected official, he should depart with his head held high. His dedicated service as Oregon's 33rd governor was in the best tradition of the office.

That observation might come as a surprise to some who have listened to the governor's critics in the past few years. To hear them talk, Atiyeh has done little or nothing, thus leaving a leadership void that created many of the state's current problems and woes.

Don't believe it. Atiyeh kept Oregon's ship of state afloat through some of the worst gales ever to drive it toward the reefs of economic disaster.

Someday, soon we hope, he'll get the credit he deserves. His steady, underpublicized leadership prevented us from heading for the lifeboats in panic, though at times that seemed like the most reasonable thing to do.

Unlike many today, who seem eager to criticize the man, we're proud to say we liked him from the very first, and we endorsed him with confidence in 1978 and 1982. Although the governor and this writer didn't always agree, we'd like to note for the record that he never disappointed us.

Oregon was rolling along when he took office in 1978 — after he defeated Democrat Bob Straub 498,452 to 409,411 — but the state's economic engine was running on fumes. The huge budget surplus of 1979 soon was nothing but a fond memory.

High oil prices hit the United States hard when 1980 arrived. The nation's economy ran out of gas, and sputtered into a deep depression/recession. In Oregon, where housing and lumber set the pace for everything, the bottom fell out. Instead of discussing ways to use surplus funds, state officials were soon meeting with the legislators in special sessions to make budget cuts and decide on layoffs.

Atiyeh didn't try to hide the problems, or suggest that somebody else was responsible. He faced the reality of Oregon's problems and worked hard — darn hard — to make sure that it, its government and its citizens would survive to enjoy better days.

Oregonians know that truth deep down. That's why they overwhelmingly re-elected Atiyeh to a second term in 1982 when they gave him 639,841 votes to Democrat Ted Kulongoski's 374,316.



Gov. Atiyeh

Today, the governor deserves credit for holding state government together when financial disasters and political struggles had many talking major demolition. Through his highly visible — and sometimes unpopular — efforts both at home and abroad he also put to rest the idea that Oregon was closed to outsiders, including new business.

Both of those accomplishments set the stage for the state's current recovery. And they open the door to opportunity for Gov.-elect Neil Goldschmidt, who has plans to shift the economy into high gear.

What impressed us most over the past eight years of trials and troubles was Atiyeh's gentlemanly style. He always maintained his ability to smile and offer a kind word, his openness and candor, and his constant optimism. The latter, generated by his pride in this state and its citizens, was probably best said in a bumper sticker he introduced in February 1986. In bold letters it proclaimed: "I'm proud to be an Oregonian!"

Thanks, Vic. We're proud that you were — and still are — an Oregonian. — R.A.S.