

Atiyeh still stands tall

Victor Atiyeh is the most unappreciated Oregon governor of the modern era. Atiyeh did not have the color, magnetism or stage presence of Tom McCall or the environmental inspiration of Bob Straub. But Vic Atiyeh got Oregon through some tough times, and he did so in a matter-of-fact way, without drama or fanfare.

As the Oregon Legislature faces the daunting challenge of writing a budget for the next two fiscal years, senators and representatives would do well to reflect on Atiyeh's example.

Taking office in 1978, Atiyeh faced the onset of the so-called Carter recession. In 1982, the governor proposed an 8-percent temporary income tax surcharge. The Legislature enacted it.

A major difference between then and now is Oregon's Republican Party. The acme of GOP legislative leadership in Atiyeh's day were Lynn Newbry of Ashland and Stafford Hansell of Hermiston. Veterans of World War II, Newbry and Hansell were practical men who sought solutions in the middle of the political

spectrum. That was the legislative ethos in which Atiyeh had grown politically.

In that GOP firmament, hard times demanded budget cuts and tax increases. That should be the legislative response to our particularly hard times.

It should not be lost on Oregon Republican legislators that Atiyeh was Oregon's last Republican governor. The party's turn toward the religious right did not yield results in statute or for the party. With no statewide Republican office holders, the strategy is bankrupt.

The other new factor of the past two decades is the initiative industry, which operators such as Bill Sizemore and Russ Walker depend on for their subsistence. Its mantra will be "no new taxes," even if Oregon is in a desperate situation.

Oregonians don't need a game of legislative chicken over the next biennium's budget. We need a pragmatic solution. That must include budget cuts and tax increases. Vic Atiyeh showed us the way.

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