

# Shades of Oregon's Atiyeh, it's time for Dino Rossi

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**T**HERE was once a Republican state senator from a large suburban city, a businessman, a quiet worker in taxes and budgets. After a string of liberal governors, he sought the governorship with a simple motto: "It's time for ..."

Rossi?

That could describe Dino Rossi, but the GOP senator actually was named Victor Atiyeh, and he served two terms as Oregon's governor, from 1979-87. His slogan was simply, "It's time for Atiyeh," and everyone knew what he meant.

Voters saw a quiet, calm man of fiscal probity who promised little but exuded an air of good business sense. When he stated, "It's time for Atiyeh," voters nodded and said they would like to slow the carousel a bit, take stock of what they had done, and think about where to go in the future.

Oregon had experienced an exciting and sometimes tumultuous ride under Govs. Tom McCall (1967-75) and Bob Straub (1975-79). The famous "Tom and Bob Show" of Oregon's liberal era, McCall a Republican and Straub a Democrat, presided over 12 years of activist government.

Atiyeh failed in 1974 to stop the show, losing to Straub, but he won handily in 1978, turning back McCall in the GOP primary, then besting Straub in the general. It was time for Atiyeh.

Dino Rossi didn't borrow that slogan, but the similarity of the two men is striking, and so are the circumstances of Oregon in 1975 and Washington in 2004.

We don't know today whether Rossi or Christine Gregoire will be governor in 2005, but Rossi's strong run in what was for Washington a Democratic year tells us something beyond the fact that Gregoire ran a pathetic campaign that gave voters few good reasons to vote for her.

Rossi didn't tell us much, either, but he didn't need to tell us that we have had Democratic governors since 1984. Voters don't like to be taken for granted, and Gregoire appeared to do that.



JOHN LOK / THE SEATTLE TIMES

*Republican Gov.-elect Dino Rossi answers questions from the media.*

Again, the idea of, "It's time."

Rossi was also the first really decent Republican challenger in a long time, and he ran from a GOP stronghold, the suburbs around Seattle. Add that to Eastern Washington and you have the same appeal Atiyeh had in Oregon, running from his Beaverton base and piling up votes in Eastern Oregon.

Both Rossi and Atiyeh are moderate-to-conservative Republicans, not identified with the religious right or the anti-tax crusaders. They didn't scare Democrats in the way that Ellen Craswell did eight years ago.

Washington's 2004 economy and state of mind are a bit like Oregon's at the end of the '70s. Oregon had come off a period in which it was widely touted as the most exciting place in the country. McCall's programs in environmental protection, saving the beaches and other highly publicized efforts gave the state

bragging rights. But under Straub the economy began to slide, some of the luster wore off with the departure of the charismatic McCall, and it looked like tight times ahead. Thus, "It's time for Atiyeh."

In like measure, the last few years have seen the dot-com bubble burst, Boeing's corporate move to Chicago and unemployment levels that have brought a sense of reality to the state, and in particular Seattle, which was enjoying a ride as America's sweetheart during the late 1990s. Thus, "It's time for Rossi."

It's too late to adopt that slogan for 2004, but it could be a winner in 2008 in the event that Gregoire wins a hand recount and Rossi is turned away at the Capitol's door.

The "three strikes" aspect of state election law is difficult, frustrating — but the law clearly calls for a third count, and Rossi would have demanded the same if he were trailing by 42 votes.

The next four years won't be a sled ride for either person, but they would be particularly difficult for Gregoire if she snatches the crown from a party that has waited two decades and won on the first two counts.

The campaign gave Washington two competent, if uninspiring, candidates, and the winner is likely to be a competent, if uninspiring, governor.

Unlike presidents, governors must balance their budget, and they can't distract voters by declaring war. The work of a governor is down and dirty — balance the budget, deal with legislators and interest groups, and at the same time try to look like a leader. Starting so late to assemble an administration begins the term with one foot in the bucket, and legislators and the rest of us will do well to give the winner some slack.



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