

OPINION

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Editorial page editor: Dick Hughes, (503) 399-6727; dhughes@StatesmanJournal.com

Our Viewpoint

Atiyeh's governing a guide in recession

Legislators should balance private, business needs

Former Gov. Vic Atiyeh is back in vogue.

In grappling with the state's current budget crisis, officials have recounted how Republican Atiyeh and Democratic legislative leaders addressed the devastating recession of the early 1980s: They enacted tax increases, along with budget cuts.

That era does provide a valuable lesson. But current lawmakers need to look at the whole picture.

Most of the 1980s tax increases were temporary. The 2009 Legislature, however, has seized on the current recession as an opportunity to rewrite tax policy. On a party line vote, the House Revenue Committee last week approved proposals to significantly boost taxes on corporations and on the wealthiest Oregonians. Part of that increase would be permanent.

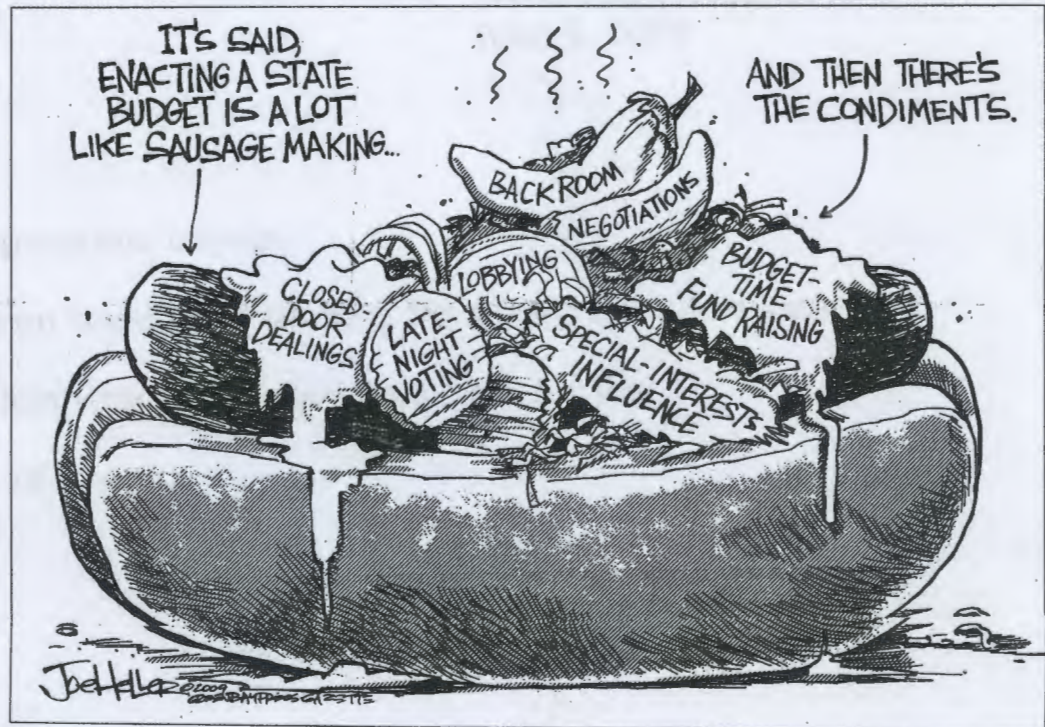
As governor, Atiyeh was a fiscal conservative, a businessman. He understood that when corporations consider states in which to locate or expand, an important criterion is how the company's executives and their families will fare. How good are the schools? How safe is the community? And how much personal income tax will management have to pay?

That tax calculus has been less evident in the 2009 Legislature. The Democratic leadership has been talking about achieving tax fairness as a rationale to raise corporate taxes.

There is no question that in recent decades the overall Oregon tax burden has shifted to individuals and families — including many small businesses — and away from corporations.

But Oregon businesses are hurting, which is why Oregon's unemployment rate is No. 2 in the nation. Significant, permanent tax increases would seem counterproductive.

Oregon leaders also could learn two other things from



Atiyeh's governing.

One was his accessibility. He often ate in the Capitol restaurant, where anyone could talk to him, and he held frequent press conferences to discuss issues with Oregonians. He truly saw himself as a servant of his fellow Oregonians, not a career politician.

The second was the sacrifice of state workers to balance the budget. Atiyeh set the example by cutting his own salary three times. Today's public employees, like their colleagues in the private sector, are being asked to make similar sacrifices in pay freezes, even pay cuts, to save as many jobs as possible.

In honoring Atiyeh last month, the Oregon House passed a resolution that noted "... Governor Atiyeh demonstrated courage, leadership and bipartisanship when faced with the economic decline in the early 1980s. ..."

Today's economic climate is both better and worse than in the 1980s. But bipartisan leadership is just as important.

Whom to contact

You can write to the governor, legislative leaders and Marion and Polk County legislators at their office number at the state Capitol, 900 Court St. NE, Salem, OR 97301-4045. Or use the following phone numbers and e-mail addresses:

GOV. TED KULONGOSKI: Office, Room 254; (503) 378-4582; fax, (503) 378-6827; www.governor.state.or.us

SENATE PRESIDENT PETER COURTHNEY, D-SALEM: Office, S-201; (503) 986-1600; sen.petercourthney@state.or.us

SENATE DEMOCRATIC LEADER RICHARD DEVLIN, D-TUALATIN: Office, S-223; (503) 986-1719; sen.richarddevlin@state.or.us

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER TED FERRIOLI, R-JOHN DAY: Office, S-323; (503) 986-1950; sen.tedferrioli@state.or.us

SEN. LARRY GEORGE, R-SHERWOOD: Office, S-307; (503) 986-1713; sen.larrygeorge@state.or.us

SEN. JACKIE WINTERS, D-SALEM: Office, S-301; (503) 986-1710; sen.jacklewinters@state.or.us

SEN. FRED GIROD, R-LYONS: Office, S-421; (503) 986-1709; sen.fredgirod@state.or.us

SEN. BRIAN BOQUIST, R-DALLAS: Office, S-305; (503) 986-1712; sen.brianboquist@state.or.us

HOUSE SPEAKER DAVE HUNT, D-CLACKAMAS COUNTY: Office, H-269; (503) 986-1440; rep.davehunt@state.or.us

HOUSE REPUBLICAN LEADER BRUCE HANNA, R-ROSEBURG: Office, H-395; (503) 986-1407; rep.brucehanna@state.or.us

HOUSE DEMOCRATIC LEADER MARY NOLAN, D-PORTLAND: Office, H-295; (503) 986-1436; rep.marynolan@state.or.us

REP. KIM THATCHER, R-KEIZER: Office, H-472; (503) 986-1425; rep.kimthatcher@state.or.us

REP. VICKI BERGER, D-SALEM: Office, H-479; (503) 986-1420; rep.vickiberger@state.or.us

REP. BRIAN CLEM, D-SALEM: Office, H-284; (503) 986-1421; rep.brianclem@state.or.us

REP. KEVIN CAMERON, R-SALEM: Office, H-390; (503) 986-1419; rep.kevincameron@state.or.us

REP. SHERRIE SPRENGER, R-SCIO: Office, H-473; (503) 986-1417; rep.sherriesprenger@state.or.us

REP. JIM THOMPSON, D-DALLAS: Office, H-388; (503) 986-1423; rep.jimthompson@state.or.us

REP. VIC GILLIAM, R-SILVERTON: Office, H-389; (503) 986-1418; rep.vicgilliam@state.or.us

REP. BETTY KOMP, D-WOODBURN: Office, H-273; (503) 986-1422; rep.bettykomp@state.or.us

REP. JIM WEIDNER, R-YAMHILL: Office, H-387; (503) 986-1424; rep.jimweidner@state.or.us

OTHER LEGISLATORS: Call (503) 986-1000 or (800) 332-2313. The names, addresses and office phone numbers for all legislators are at www.leg.state.or.us, or e-mail help.leg@state.or.us

John H. McMillan
2280 Timothy Dr. NW
Salem, OR 97304
503-588-2114
jmcmillan@willamette.edu
June 9, 2009

Dear Vic,


An appropriate tribute.

Have you considered running for a third term next year.

This Democrat would cheerfully vote for you.

Hope all is well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JH', written in a cursive style.