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Likewise, the more people who are employed and the larger their incomes, the more money flows into the state revenue stream.

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Oregon’s past economic history is a schizophrenic tale—divided between eras when Oregon chose to be part of the global economy, and eras when Oregon turns inward and fails in love with its own uniqueness. But a peculiar phenomenon takes place during these eras when Oregon decides to act like the Ginko and Narcissus, surrendering its own reflection. When Oregonians start talking about our “unique quality of life” and how “Things Look Different Here” and when they will travel—“Visit but Don’t Stay”—that is when the state’s unemployment rate skyrockets. Four distinct eras demonstrate this phenomenon. In the first two eras we chose to be economically vibrant in the other two we chose not to be competitive, but instead to be introspective about our unique lifestyle. Despite the fine work of Govs. Atiyeh and Goldschmidt to revitalize a strong business climate, once again Oregon chose instead to gaze at its own reflection. For the last 25 years, Oregonians preferred to “Keep Portland Weird,” and to ensure that “Things Look Different Here.”

Oregon, Open for Business: 1979-1992
Governors: AlJoyah, Goldschmidt

Governor Vic Atiyeh holds a press conference in The Oregonian building in downtown Portland. McCall's “Visit But Don’t Stay” sign. AlJoyeh makes site visits to Japan and Chile and 200-100 companies locate in Oregon. Intel builds $1.5 billion research and development campus in Hillsboro. The Wall Street Journal reports that by the end of 1980 more money is invested in the semiconductor industry in Portland than in the rest of the nation. The Portland metropolitan area is the site of the nation’s leading marina for sailboat construction.

Oregon, has twice as many Fortune 500 companies as Portland's metropolitan area has just two, Nike and Precision Castparts. The evidence shows that Southern red states are more business friendly than Pacific Coast blue states. But Oregon does Oregon to compare other Northern U.S. blue states—states that have a similar reputation for progressive politics. A look at the numbers is not positive for Oregon. The four Northern U.S. blue states with politics similar to Oregon are: Minnesota, Wisconsin, Washington, and Massachusetts. All four states, though roughly double Oregon’s population, are at least somewhat similar in business atmosphere to Oregon, and could be expected to have a similar number of Fortune 500 companies headquartered in their states, at least proportionally. But that’s not true. And the comparison numbers are stark. While Oregon hosts two Fortune 500 companies, Washington state is home to eight, Massachusetts to 12, Wisconsin to 10, and Minnesota to 12. Half of the Fortune 500 companies headquartered in Oregon have less than 32 employees. Even Nebraska, which is smaller than Oregon, has twice as many Fortune 500 companies as Oregon. Why are these politically similar blue states so badly underperforming Oregon’s business atmosphere as measured by number of Fortune 500 companies headquartered in a state? Answer: Oregon has now developed a national and worldwide reputation for being hostile to corporate business. Oregon’s tax system is not considered competitive by large national and international capital gains tax, and the state’s European-style land use laws are imposed in the most restrictive in the country. On the capital basis, Or- egon has fewer Fortune 500 companies and ranks 29th among the states in its borders by any other state.

ECONOMIC TIMES OF OREGON

The dark side of introspection

“When I left office in January of ’87, I said publicly that the gas tank in Oregon’s economy was filled. We had created a better business climate in Oregon than in either California or Washington.”

Oregon decides that “Things Look Different Here” and a string of generous state and regulatory policies that send business into a tailspin. The public employee unions take unprecedented control of state politics. In the 2008 election, the OEA and NEA spend $12 million on campaigns cementing their ownership of Oregon politics. Money is spent by public unions on política that make it more difficult for any other state to achieve, within the exception of California.

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The China connection brings jobs to Oregon

Oregon has felt the effects of the national recession far more than most states. Oregon's unemployment rate has risen more than doubled since the housing boom ended in 2006, and it has remained above the national average for more than a year. The state's General Fund has barely grown. It has gone up a whopping 49 percent since 2005-07 it only went up about 1 per cent and 307 percent for more than a year.

In the 14 years that unemployment has been above the national average, the state all-funds budget has grown by 181 percent. That's right – 161 percent.

As the chart to the right shows, the public sector added more than 400 jobs to its payroll, and 11.1 percent and 10.7 percent for more than a year. It has stood stubbornly between 10.5 percent and 10.7 percent for more than 14 straight years. It has stood above the national average for more than a year. Oregon has also been exporting grass and golf products in its

China connection brings jobs to Oregon

In 2008, Oregon exports to China reached $2.3 billion in sales. In 2009, Oregon exports to China reached $2.2 billion in sales. In 2010, Oregon exports to China are expected to reach $2.4 billion in sales. In 2011, Oregon exports to China are expected to reach $2.5 billion in sales. Just since 2005, the state's budget has gone up a whopping 49 percent since 2005.

The only question that most Oregonians may want to ask themselves is whether their own tax dollars will bear fruit in many ways. As China's middle and upper economic classes grow, many Chinese families want their children to attend college in the U.S. Oregon state universities pay full non-resident tuition and gain a first-class American education. In addition, relationships are made between Oregon and Chinese students that will last a lifetime. In addition, the win-win benefits for both the university and the students, strong friendships made will bear fruit in many ways throughout the students' careers. China wants to buy Oregon products, and Oregon companies provide employment to Oregon workers to grow and produce products for Chinese consumers.

The vision of Gov. Atiyeh still pays dividends today. His legacy is a stunning example of the technological, business, educational, and cultural exchange that will bear fruit internationally. The vision of Gov. Atiyeh still pays dividends today.

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Where the REAL money is

Full Funds: The state all-funds budget grows by 49 percent since 2005 when Oregon's income tax receipts were declining each year due to the deep recession. How can spending break even if we can't find a solution to Oregon's budget shortfall?

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Every two years when the Oregon legislature meets to decide on the state’s budget, the question of how much to spend on education always is the most controversial budget issue. One issue that doesn’t get much discussion in the legislature, however, is whether Oregon gets a good return on investment it makes in its schools. Most legislators say that K-12 education is their highest priority. This no doubt reflects the fact that Oregon Education Association (OEA), Oregon’s largest teachers union, is the state’s most powerful union.

A report released this summer by the non-partisan education policy journal Education Next showed that Oregon’s teachers union spends far more on politics than any other teachers union in the country. The OEA spent $357 per teacher in 2008 to influence elections, compared to a national average of $22 per teacher. The Colorado teachers union was the next highest, spending less than half the per-teacher amount spent by the OEA. The union’s investment in politics appears to have paid dividends. Oregon’s per-student education spending is above every other western state in the lower 48 states. According to the National Education Association’s “Ranking of the States 2009,” Oregon led every western state in per pupil spending. In the 2007-08 school year, the latest year for which numbers are available, California spent $11,111 per student in the 2007-08 school year, the lowest year for which numbers are available.

The western region of the United States, as a whole the second wealthiest region in the country, ranks well above the rest of the nation in per capita income. But not so for poor Oregon. If there were four houses on a block, three well-maintained mansions and one rundown old home, it would be painfully clear where the high income earners lived and where the family lived that was struggling to make ends meet.

Oregon is becoming that house and Oregonians are the families struggling with lower per capita income than their regional neighbors. While their incomes have improved, tax have not.

Oregon reached its economic high-water mark of 22nd in the nation in per capita income back in 1993, at the peak of its economic investment in Washington County. At the time, per capita income stood at $21,611 nationally and Oregon’s stood at $22,293. Oregon’s neighbors, Washington, California and Nevada, ranked 16th, 13th and 9th respectively in per capita income.

By 2009, U.S. per capita income reached $31,138, while Oregon’s was just $30,860. Oregon has now dropped to 31st in the nation, several thousand dollars behind the national average.

What about Oregon’s neighbors? Did they slide as well? No. Today, Washington and Nevada are ranked 10th, 12th and 18th in per capita income. The Far West region, as measured by the U.S. Commerce Department, remains well above the national average, with per capita income more than $40,000 annually. Despite the high highs, however, the 1990s that helped make the West at even more prosperous region, structural problems and attitudes in Oregon have now, at last statistically, made the state lose prosperous status in nearly neighbors.

The next global economic recovery can really address the problems unique to Oregon. We’ve got some catch- up to do, and the state will need to find its own solutions.

The picture is even bleaker when the question is narrowed. How does Oregon compare to its western neighbors in measures of academic achievement? Like the measures of overall school quality, there is no single measure of academic achievement that is universally accepted for a state’s schools.

In the Quality Counts report, achievement is one of the sub-categories for their measure- ment of overall school quality. Oregon schools do poorly compared to other western states on this achievement score. While Washington ranks 17th and Idaho comes in at 22nd, Oregon ranks 48th in the nation. Oregon does not get much bang for its buck spent on K-12 education. If our relatively high spending dollars aren’t buying us generally high quality schools, or specifically, high achieving schools, what are we getting for our money?

From the study’s conclusion: “Oregonians’ elected to spend more on elementary and secondary public education relative to the average state and each of its neighboring states. This additional spending essentially fuels higher comparative expenditure for our students primarily in the form of higher than average benefits. Relative to neighboring states, Oregon also has a great- er number of non-teacher staff per teacher.”

Public K-12 education is one of the largest single line items in the state general fund budget. In the current budget, schools receive 41 percent of the $14.5 billion General Fund. Based on the Quality Counts report, there may be little reason for Oregonians to believe they are getting value for their school spending dollars.

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