

April 2007

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Nothing New Under the Sun

That which has been is what will be; That which is done is what will be done; And there is nothing new under the sun. --Ecclesiastes 1:9

Residents in these parts have a long tradition of letting out the Governor's Mansion to strong-willed chief executives. Many have governed rather effectively without undue concern for broad public support on certain issues. Biographers have described more than a few as arrogant, unswerving, and hungry for publicity. Several are notable for their surprising political achievements in the face of low public esteem. One governor personifies all of the above.

Isaac Ingalls Stevens, Washington's first territorial governor, was appointed to the position by President Franklin Pierce. They were close friends and classmates at West Point. As a favor, the President asked Stevens, an engineer and surveyor, to scope out a possible rail route through the Cascades to the Puget Sound (Stevens Pass) on his trip west.

Stevens managed to arrive in Olympia for his inauguration a day earlier than expected. Tired, hungry and soaking wet, he slipped unceremoniously into the kitchen of a local eatery to drink a cup of hot soup—no one suspecting who he was. Although locals took a liking to him and he received early support from white newcomers anxious to develop the land, he was strongly opposed by pioneer settlers and military leaders.

Governor Stevens was clearly a man of action though his methods were at times unorthodox. From the get-go, the focus of his administration was to negotiate treaties that would place Indians on reservations. Some of the Indians registered their disapproval by removing a few white scalps. Without consulting territorial legislators, Stevens posted a bounty for the scalps of the scalpers. Quite a few were delivered forthwith to the governor's front lawn for cash payment. One unfortunate Indian was even killed in the governor's office. Messy.

About that time, Stevens heard that certain Pierce County residents, namely French Canadians who were married to Indian women, weren't being molested by the renegades. He became suspicious and had six of them thrown in the clink. Anticipating trouble from territorial judge Edward Lander, Stevens quickly declared martial law in Pierce County. When Lander issued writs of habeas corpus anyway, he too was arrested and spent two days behind bars before the governor was forced to release him due to public pressure.

Once out, Judge Lander scooted for Thurston County to pursue legal action against the governor—with the backing of armed United States marshals who lined the courtroom. But Stevens didn't blink. He declared marshal law in Thurston County and circled the courthouse with his own soldiers. For added drama, a cannon was positioned in the direction of the bench. When Lander started to speak, the soldiers stormed in, taking him kicking and screaming to jail—this time for two weeks. Upon release, Lander cited Stevens for contempt of court and fined him \$50. Stevens, the citizen, paid the fine. It was immediately returned when he received a pardon from Stevens, the governor.

That and other things aside, Governor Stevens was able to report to his superiors in the other Washington that between 1854 and 1856, some 11,300 local Indians had been relocated to government reservations. Historically and practically speaking, Stevens was a capable chief executive who accomplished his goals.

Seven score and ten years later another capable chief executive is accomplishing her goals. Before this week passes, Governor Gregoire will have signed some 500 bills into law, including many personal request bills. Yesterday, during a signing ceremony in the Capitol Reception Room, she signed into law a landmark measure creating special rights for a special class of people. "This is a very proud moment for me as governor, to make sure the rights of all people are equal,"¹ Gregoire told an enthusiastic audience of nearly 100 people.

The homosexual community considers the new *Domestic Partnership* law the most important accomplishment of Gregoire's short tenure as our state's top officer. Even her political rivals recognize that she has come far since January, 2005 when only 46% of voters thought she was the duly elected governor.²

While Governor Gregoire has not clashed with any judges or Indians, she has worked closely with both—some suspect too closely. Revenues from tribal gambling operations in the state are expected to rise sharply in the near future thanks to the new tribal gambling compact negotiated by the governor. It should be noted, however, that not all of last year's record \$1.2 billion net profits from tribal gambling remained in house. Some of it wound up in last fall's judicial campaign coffers at the request of Christine Gregoire, the *citizen*.

Our strong chief executive also demonstrated her political mettle last week when the State Board of Pharmacy ruled that pharmacies must carry and be willing to dispense RU-486, the controversial new French abortifacient. The "ruling" came about after the governor trained a cannon, so to speak, at her handpicked board—something about losing their jobs if they didn't see things her way. Until now, only ipecac has been required to be available in state licensed pharmacies. Ipecac is a life-saving remedy. RU-486 is a life-ending product.

Overall, the Pacific Northwest has experienced rapid social, political and economic change in a relatively short span of time. Much of the change has been beneficial—some of it has not.

It is good that modern government does its best to provide for the equitable treatment of all without regard to race or ethnicity. It is not good that government sometimes shows contempt for Christians, acting as though people of faith belong on reservations. Neither is it good when government protects gambling, when it sanctions homosexuality, when it provides free condoms for prison inmates, and when it mandates all forms of sexual expressions to be taught to innocent minds in public schools.

And, isn't it about time for government to get out of the bounty business? Do we find it unthinkable that our first governor paid handsomely for bloody scalps but not equally disturbing that our current governor defends the practice—paying handsomely for bloody baby parts?

Obviously, there is nothing new under the sun.

Rick Forcier

Executive Director

¹ "New state law recognizes domestic partnerships," pg.1, *The Olympian*, 4/22/2007

² Moore Information Public Opinion Research, Portland, OR, 1/7/2005, www.moore-info.com