

Do endorsements matter anymore?

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Crosscut. Elections

In this edition: A look at whether local newspaper endorsements are relevant anymore, and a guide for all you last-minute voters.

When The Seattle Times Editorial Board released its endorsements for the Nov. 6 midterm election, people weren't happy about a few of the recommendations. One in particular that angered many Seattleites was the paper's [endorsement](#) of Republican Dino Rossi for the hotly contested 8th Congressional District seat, rather than Democrat Kim Schrier.

It's not necessarily anything new to have the Times' Editorial Board challenge the Seattle region's progressive narrative. But that doesn't mean it works in the candidate's favor. Crosscut looked back at races where the Seattle Times has angered voters with its endorsements to see what kind of impact it had. And over the past three years when they've gone against the grain, it hasn't seemed to have had much. Of their surprise endorsement picks, every candidate or initiative the Times didn't endorse won by at least 10 percentage points. We've listed those instances below, and talked to a few political analysts and a former journalism professor about whether endorsements have been rendered obsolete.

In 2017:

- **A consequential seat in the 45th District to flip the state Senate:** The Seattle Times [endorses](#) Republican Jinyoung Lee Englund, but she loses to Democrat Manka Dhingra, 55 to 45 percent.
- **Seattle City Council, Position 8:** The Seattle Times [endorses](#) socialist

Jon Grant, but he loses to labor organizer Teresa Mosqueda, 60 to 40 percent.

- **Seattle City Council, Position 9:** The Seattle Times [endorses](#) community activist Pat Murakami, but she loses to popular incumbent Lorena González, 71 to 29 percent.
- **Seattle City Attorney:** The Seattle Times [endorses](#) Scott Lindsay, who loses to incumbent Pete Holmes, 75 to 25 percent.

In 2016:

- **A competitive race for the 7th Congressional District:** The Seattle Times [endorses](#) state Rep. Brady Walkinshaw, but he loses to state Sen. Pramila Jayapal, 56 to 44 percent.
- **Sound Transit 3, \$54 billion to extend light rail:** The Seattle Times [recommends](#) voters reject the measure, but it's approved 54 to 46 percent.
- **Seattle Initiative 124 to improve safety conditions for hotel workers:** The Seattle Times [recommends](#) voters reject the measure, but it's approved 77 percent to 23 percent.

In 2015:

- **\$930 million 'Move Seattle' Transportation Levy:** The Seattle Times [recommends](#) voters reject the measure, but it's approved 56 to 44 percent.
- **Seattle City Council, Position 3:** The Seattle Times [endorses](#) Pamela Banks, but she loses to socialist Kshama Sawant, 56 to 44 percent.
- **Seattle City Council, Position 6:** The Seattle Times [endorses](#) activist Catherine Weatbrook, but she loses to incumbent Mike O'Brien, 61 to 28 percent.

3 perspectives on endorsements

1. Mike Henderson, taught editorial and opinion writing at UW for more than 20 years

On public perception of endorsements. “I always used to start my classes asking students if anyone could tell me where editorials come from at major metro papers and never once did a student have the correct answer. It’s the collective opinion of members of the editorial board and really always has been. Knowing

that in any given editorial board, some members might be more equal than others. I mean if Frank Blethen (Publisher and CEO of The Seattle Times) insists on endorsing Dino Rossi, then that's the way it's going to be even if the other members don't see it that way. Members in the public don't know, or likely don't care where editorials come from.

I just heard in the grocery line the other day someone making reference to the Times endorsing Dino Rossi. Well, the Times doesn't endorse Rossi. The Times Editorial Board does. It's a screwy deal."

On what kind of sway endorsements have. "About twenty years ago, a guy named Keith Callow was running for re-election to the state Supreme Court. Every major newspaper and minor paper not only endorsed Callow, but did so with no provisos whatsoever. He was the guy. Even though that was the case, a guy whose last name was Johnson won the election. Later when a local pollster tried to measure what the reason for that might have been, it turned out people voted for Johnson rather than Callow because they liked his name better. Callow was like a hero of jurisprudence in the state for decades and he lost the election because of his last name.

Obviously different people have different reasons for being interested. I think most people may find the endorsements useful to differentiate between candidates and if not pick a winner, pick someone who is least likely to be an egregious pick of some kind. It just depends on what the perspective is and most people are just out there living their lives. They don't have the time or need to get into the mysteries of how The Seattle Times Editorial Board decides to give an endorsement."

2. Alex Hays, Republican political consultant:

On whether endorsements matter anymore. "In just pure political analysis, endorsements matter the most on an issue campaign, and nonpartisan races. Because of hardening partisanship, if The Seattle Times tells you a member of your party isn't a good actor, you probably aren't going to believe that because of tribalism. Sometimes the editorial board steps into a race that is outside of tribal politics and it can add an important intellectual component. That's where it has the most utility, is in nonpartisan races and issue-based areas."

On why the Times' endorsements haven't changed the outcomes of races. "Seattle has a very aggressive political class. You'll notice a lot of these people started demonizing [The] Seattle Times. Well before Trump criticized the press, Seattle progressives attacked the Times because they didn't get what they wanted. It was a body that wasn't for sale and wasn't part of their political culture they could bully or press. It's immune to their pressure, so they set it up to attack it in an effort to reduce its credibility.

It's not the job of [The] Seattle Times to say what they think is going to pass, it's their job to say what they think is in the best interest of the community. Seattle would be a more just, liveable and happy place if the editorial board's opinions prevailed more often."

On whether the Dino Rossi endorsement will matter. "Probably not, because of the volume of money involved. It helps some and is always better to have a whisper of help come your way rather than no help at all. ... If the Times had endorsed Schrier, the very people who claim it doesn't matter would be telling you how much it mattered that they endorsed Schrier. Oftentimes this notion that an endorsement doesn't help or matter is offered by the people who lost the endorsement."

3. Ben Anderstone, Democratic political consultant

On whether endorsements matter. "They do matter. People look at them as a leading indicator: if you're someone who wants a left leaning candidate then you have The Stranger or if you're someone who wants a centrist, the Times endorsements are a good proxy for that. But with declining newspaper readership and the sheer amount of information available on the internet, I think it's fair to say that endorsements don't carry nearly as much weight as they used to, but they still show up when you look at election results, there are still clear indicators they do matter for certain groups."

On when endorsements do have sway. "When you look at the Jon Grant vs. Teresa Mosqueda race [for Seattle City Council], after endorsing Sara Nelson in the primary, they endorsed Grant, who wasn't the candidate you'd expect them to endorse. Mosqueda was getting the more moderate voters, but after the endorsement [you saw a spike in the older, higher income votes](#) for Grant between the primary and general. In Broadmoor, the Republican part of town, Grant got 35 percent of the vote, a spike from the primaries. That endorsement got him a solid voting bloc of older, more moderate homeowners which is kind of The Seattle Times' demographic. [Endorsements] probably have less of an influence on partisan votes because when it's nonpartisan, people are a little more lost at sea and looking for what a candidate might value that the partisan label provides, and a nonpartisan city council race, for example, doesn't have that."

On whether The Seattle Times Editorial Board is out of line with Seattle. "They're much more moderate than Seattle, but I don't think they're claiming to represent the Seattle electorate. Sometimes in their endorsements they'll specifically say, 'This candidate is a good fit for this district.' And they'll kind of modify their endorsement based on who they think is a good fit for the district, but they're willing to endorse candidates based on reasons most Seattle voters would disagree with. So out of step, yeah, but I don't think they're trying to be on the cutting edge of public opinion when they do their endorsements."

For its part, the Times Editorial Board describes the endorsements as a way for readers to sort through the deluge of advertising for candidates and ballot issues. [In a column](#), Editorial Page Editor Kate Riley said, “The Seattle Times Editorial Board is here to help.” She went on to explain the months of work, starting in May, that went into deciding who to endorse among some 130 candidates and ballot positions.

— [Cambria Roth](#)

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A procrastinator's guide to Washington's election

Crosscut doesn't do the whole endorsement thing, but we do believe in making sure our readers are informed! That's why we've put together our annual election guide, which has everything in one place: short descriptions of races, which newspapers endorsed who and links to stories about the candidates and issues statewide and in the Puget Sound region.

[Get informed here](#)...then go vote!

Arguments for and against initiatives

We've compiled arguments from a variety of individuals who want you to know how they feel about the carbon fee, gun initiative and more. Read their opinions, in their own words, about why they're supporting — or not supporting — an initiative. Then decide for yourself.

I-1631's Carbon Fee: [For](#) and [against](#)

I-1639's gun initiative: [For](#) and [against](#)

I-1634's controls on grocery taxes: [For](#) and [against](#)

Seattle's Families, Education, Preschool Levy: [For](#) and [against](#)

Spotted on the corner of 23rd and Union





Spotted on this popular corner in the Central District: a friendly Seattleite holding a "Mail your ballots" sign before taking a break to get a man some lemonade and an "I Voted!" sticker.

Election 2018 must reads

'Deep state' or deep sixed? The Washington Supreme Court race that's getting buried ([KUOW](#))

Jeff Bezos-funded super PAC attacks Democrat as a traitor who didn't support America after 9/11 ([Huffington Post](#))

How much would I-1631's carbon fee cost you? That depends ([The Seattle Times](#))

Climate change initiative's surprising showdown pits tech leaders against oil and gas industry ([Geekwire](#))

A month after rape allegation against Sen. Joe Fain, and still no word on an investigation ([The Seattle Times](#))

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