



Inaugural Address
of
The Honorable Victor Atiyeh
Governor of the State of Oregon
to the
Sixty-Second
Legislative Assembly
January 10, 1983

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Sixty-Second Legislative Assembly, and Fellow Oregonians:

Today, I begin my twenty-fifth year of public life in service to the State of Oregon. For twenty of those years, I embarked on a legislative journey like the one you now begin.

Those of you who worked with me to shape Oregon, and those of you who now turn to the task, can appreciate the perspective that only the years can bring. As great Oregonians passed from the scene, others came forward to take their place. As some issues lingered unresolved, others were squarely faced. Each Oregon year has been marked both by its character—and its continuity. Through it all, we have built something special: the Oregon story.

The passage of time alone tells us that the Oregon story is not a book already written. It is a book that is always being written. And we begin a new chapter today as I stand before you at this midpoint of my Governorship.

Four years ago, I began with a promise and a challenge. I promised to set a high standard of performance in all that I would do. I challenged Oregonians to meet and exceed that standard. At the same time, I said: "If all the people of Oregon can take to their hearts the age-old concept of volunteerism, we can reduce the need for government intervention and tax support, we can improve the quality of life in Oregon, and we can grow as a community."

And so it has been.

The road has not been easy. When we met in January of 1979, few of us foresaw the potentials for disaster that lay ahead.

Again and again new challenges arose. As we wearily surmounted one obstacle, another would appear before us. Every crest revealed another to be climbed. But throughout this time of trial, we have been sustained by our inner strength, our western stamina, and the tremendous pride we have in ourselves as Oregonians.

In the November election, we were tested once more. We were brought once again to the brink by a series of hard choices that confronted our people. And we were tested in the midst of a recession

so deep that—to all but a few—these are the hardest times in memory.

But Oregonians did not overwhelm us with rage and rejection. Instead of devastating the foundations of local government and discarding the land use achievements of a decade, Oregonians—in an historic vote—have given us another chance.

But make no mistake: this is our last chance.

We have a final opportunity to reforge the bonds of public trust.

We must make meaningful and lasting reforms in our runaway system of property taxation.

We must preserve our priceless achievements in statewide land use planning by improving the system.

And we must accomplish this within the limited means of today—yet be ready to move strongly forward into the better economy of tomorrow. We are balanced on a fragile fulcrum—it is now solely within our hands to decide which way the balance will swing.

The opportunities are now before us. The patience of our people is not limitless.

The path will be difficult, but the direction is very clear.

1983-85 BUDGET

That direction is embodied in all my recommendations, and begins with the budget and revenue packages now before you.

With over \$5 billion per year spent in all programs, it is often said that state government is the biggest business in the state—and the Governor would do well to run it like one.

So I have. In four years, despite very tumultuous times, we have brought a high level of productivity, economy, and common sense to state government. Oregonians can be proud of their government—we live in one of the best-managed states in the nation. We have brought a level of effectiveness to state activities that will last Oregon far into

the foreseeable future. We are serving our citizens better than ever before.

But when we speak of running government like a business, there is a basic condition we must never forget: businesses close their doors, but government dare not—indeed cannot.

- Government cannot fail to uphold the civil rights and property rights of its citizens.
- Government cannot fail to provide for education and roads, to find aid for the helpless, and to fight for the common good.
- Government cannot fail to enforce the law, and arrest the lawbreaker.

It has been truly said that the role of government is not to confer happiness, but to give people the opportunity to work out happiness for themselves. Our nation was founded on that great principle.

That is why we cannot allow government to close its doors. Putting a stop to government is putting a stop to the fabric that holds our society together, and to the opportunity of all citizens to achieve their own destiny.

The budget I have submitted to you reflects, in every part, these beliefs. This budget asks only that we attend to our most critical needs.

Those needs rest upon a series of revenue recommendations: tax reductions and tax increases. The recommendations are carefully crafted, interwoven, and interdependent. They must be considered as part of a total revenue package. They must stand or fall on that basis—as a total package. A total package of limitation and reform.

Because reform we must. And limit we must. No message is clearer today than those twin messages from the people of this state.

PROPERTY TAXES

In the November election, Ballot Measure 3 proposed a property tax rollback and limitation that would have unfairly devastated

local government and schools in Oregon. That it was defeated is an everlasting credit to Oregon voters. That it almost passed is a final warning to us.

The property tax limitation and relief proposal now recommended to you is designed to limit responsibly the unchecked growth in real property assessments. It is designed to do so without major damage to hard pressed local governments. And it is designed in conjunction with measures to provide relief to low and moderate income homeowners and renters.

Without action to limit the appalling growth of property taxes, a Ballot Measure 3 will be back. And next time it will pass. What we fail to do now will be done for us at the polls—and done in a way that could cripple Oregon.

LAND USE

Ballot Measure 6 was the third attempt to abolish our state land use program in Oregon. It was defeated in November by a narrow margin.

I support statewide land use planning. I have supported it from the beginning. Land use planning is vital to our future. It is a blueprint for our growth as a state.

Yet we all have felt the heat of anger and resentment that the process has sometimes created. The proposals I recommend for your early action will restore a common sense approach and finish—finally—the plan acknowledgement process. The measures before you will make the system better, faster, and less abrasive.

Much has already been done in the past four years to improve the process. But the actions I recommend to you represent a critical last step. Without that step, we will surely see another Ballot Measure 6. And without that step, the accomplishments of a decade, the years of public effort and public dollars will be in danger of being cast into oblivion.

OTHER LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Land use and tax reforms are major priorities. But I have recommended to you a number of additional priorities—legislative packages around which much of my budget has been built.

Separate, significantly important legislation is being introduced at my request in the areas of:

- **economic development**—to build on the strong program we began in 1979 and greatly enhanced last year; sending a signal throughout the land that Oregon wants jobs for Oregonians;
- **public safety**—a desperately needed program expansion to add jail space, strengthen the ability of our state police to fight crime and the narcotics traffic, and bring added assistance to our Attorney General and District Attorneys around the state;
- **forest products**—a series of steps that will marshal significant new assistance for one of our state's keystone industries; and
- **higher education**—to restore momentum, and create a vital new partnership between higher education and our efforts in economic development.

Woven into my budget—and into each program we have submitted—is one overwhelming concern: people. People—Oregonians of all ages—who need jobs, who need security, who need a decent education. People must and will continue to be the number one priority of state government.

At the same time, we know that the severe economic downturn has stretched the fabric of society very thin. That is why it has never been more important to remember our commitment to human rights, human dignity, and equal opportunity for every Oregonian. This commitment is never more important than in hard times. It is especially incumbent upon us, the elected representatives of the people of Oregon, to join together with all citizens and strongly reaffirm that the rights, the dignity, and the equality of every Oregonian are matters to us of the first importance.

CONCLUSION

Twenty years ago in this chamber, Governor Hatfield reminded us that the problems we meet are never as large as those we dodge. In an era of severe limitations, we have too often taken a path of short-term solutions to the long-term challenges we face. Instead of seizing opportunities, we have grasped at straws. Instead of making sense of our tax system, we have burdened it with short-term answers which have only raised more questions. And instead of making serious reforms in response to overwhelming demand, we have sought to appease anger with short-term devices that only compounded the difficulty.

If we now think only of this biennium, if we insist on limping through another two years with half-measures and temporary solutions, our inaction will damage our state for decades to come.

It is always difficult to take the long view. But it is critical for the future of Oregon.

When Governor Oswald West declared Oregon's beaches a public right-of-way in 1913, his vision preserved a heritage we treasure today. When Governor Tom McCall took heroic steps to begin our state land use program; and Governor Bob Straub won priceless miles for the Willamette River Greenway; their vision created a heritage our children will enjoy.

Before I leave office as Governor of Oregon, I in turn want to see our unmatched Columbia River Gorge preserved and protected for future generations. Like goals of the past, my vision too will require dedication, hard work, and the concerned commitment of many Oregonians.

So, when I tell you that we must take our hats off to the past—I know that we must also roll our sleeves up for the future. A better future.

When we gather here to fulfill the high trust placed in us by the people of Oregon, the decisions we make will be remembered—or regretted—by our own grandchildren.

Truly, we are tomorrow's past.

You know my philosophy. You know my dedication to lean government, good management, and essential services for least cost. And each of you shares with me a firm dedication to the values and qualities that make Oregon what it is: a state unique in the nation and the world, and a state to which we pledge our best skills, our highest honor, and our firmest determination.

My recommendations are based on my philosophy. That philosophy says, above all, that we must listen to the voices of the people of this state.

They are not only the voices in the lobby adjoining this chamber. They are not only the voices that speak through the letters that fill our mailboxes. They are not only the voices that know how to be heard in the hearing rooms and conference halls of Salem.

They are voices from every corner of Oregon that are clear if you are but willing to listen . . . To listen . . .

Because if you listen, you will hear that government by the people is not a theory. It is the living process through which Oregonians have built a western wilderness into the brightest, most progressive, most magnificent state among fifty within the best nation on earth.

I believe this very deeply. I know that the people of Oregon join with me in this belief. And I believe that the people of this state not only want to restore Oregon's economic health—they want with equal fervor to preserve and defend the special qualities that make our state unique.

Because Oregon *is* unique.

Once we were pioneers in the great move westward. We have continued our pioneering ways in direct citizen participation in government—through the initiative, the referendum, our volunteer boards and commissions, and our strong tradition of a part-time, citizen legislature. We are pioneers in planning for the future—the future of our economy, the preservation of our natural resources, the use of our land, and the quality of our life.

We must never lose sight of the qualities that make Oregon, Oregon. We must never forget our special combination of natural and human resources. We are a land and a people looked up to around the world; a state that has set the standard in progressive policymaking, good government, and balance between our growth and our resources. We must never yield to lachrymose cynicism, nor can we ever reject the bedrock virtues upon which our progress—and our commonwealth—have been built.

As this Sixty-Second Oregon Legislature convenes—as your labors proceed—I know that each of you will want to work to keep faith with the people’s trust. As the difficult press of legislative business unwinds before you, I ask that you maintain your perspective on the living history of our state—on the chapter of the Oregon Story that you personally will write in the months ahead. And I ask that you never forget the special Oregon qualities that will live on long after your own work is done.

When our efforts are history; when others have taken our place; our achievements can be measured only by the legacy we leave.

I pray that those who follow us will examine our work and share in full measure the motivation for all we do: deep humility, honorable service, and fierce pride.

Humility for the bounty that is ours; service to the citizens we represent; and pride in the great state we serve.

Our feeling is shared, in good times and bad, by every citizen. As in the first century of our history, so in the second century and beyond, I know that our citizens—and each one of us—can stand anywhere in the world and count it a matter of special pride to say:

“I am an Oregonian.”

