



Oregon State Archives

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GOVERNOR BARBARA ROBERTS ADMINISTRATION

January 14, 1991 to January 9, 1995

Biographical Note

Barbara Roberts was inaugurated as Oregon's first woman governor on Jan. 14, 1991. She completed her term as 34th governor in 1995.

Roberts, a 4th generation Oregonian, was born in Corvallis on Dec. 21, 1936 and grew up in Sheridan, where she graduated from Sheridan High School. She attended Portland State University, 1961-1964; the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University, 1989; and Marylhurst College. She has two sons, Mark and Mike Sanders, and was married to state senator Frank Roberts from 1974 until his death in 1993. [The legislative records of Senator Frank Roberts are open for research at the Oregon State Archives.]



Barbara Roberts began her career in public service as an advocate for handicapped children. She began as an unpaid lobbyist in 1969 spurred by concerns for her autistic son, Mike. She served on the Parkrose School Board, the Mt. Hood Community College Board, and the Multnomah County Commission before her election to the Oregon House of Representatives in 1981. During her second term, she became Oregon's first woman House majority leader.

In 1984 she was elected secretary of state, and became the first Democrat elected to that post in 114 years. She was reelected in 1988. Significant achievements of Roberts' terms as secretary of state include election reform legislation, the construction of a new Archives building, and broader audit powers for the secretary of state. She also chaired the Governor's Worker's Compensation Reform Task Force and was the Governor's Representative to the Hanford Waste Board. [The records of Secretary of State Barbara Roberts are open for research at the Oregon State Archives.]

Roberts ran unopposed in the Democratic primary in 1990 and was subsequently elected to succeed Governor Neil Goldschmidt. She defeated Dave Frohnmayer (Republican) and Al Mobley (Independent). During her term as governor, Roberts was recognized as a strong advocate for public education, human rights and services, environmental management, and streamlining state government.

In 1990, Oregon voters passed Measure 5 which established constitutional limits on property tax rates. Responding to voter discontent with rising property taxes and perceived government inefficiency, Roberts initiated a project which she called "Conversation with Oregon" to help formulate a strategy to streamline government service and reform the tax system. The Conversation With Oregon Records document the organization of this project which relied on volunteers to solicit citizen opinions and suggestions. The project also made use of ED-NET, the statewide telecommunications network, to enable the governor to meet with citizens throughout the state to discuss Oregon's taxation system and state government spending priorities following the passage of Measure 5.

In response to Measure 5 and as a result of her Conversation with Oregon, Roberts promoted legislation to make state government more efficient, reduced the total number of positions and the number of management positions in state government, eliminated and consolidated boards and commissions, and

encouraged privatization of government functions. Oregon earned a national reputation for solid government management and for workforce and education innovations.

Roberts worked with the Clinton administration to secure federal waivers and funding for the Oregon Health Plan. Additional accomplishments include an increase in the number of children in the Head Start program, the financing of additional units of affordable housing, and programs to help move Oregonians from welfare to the workplace. The Roberts administration was known for its strong gay rights advocacy and its appointment of women and minorities to positions in state government.

These and many other issues are documented in the Governor Barbara Roberts Records. The records include a number of administrative and correspondence files that are organized topically and reflect the variety of issues and programs that the governor and her staff dealt with. Subject files can be found in the Chief of Staff Records, Governor's Correspondence, Intergovernmental Relations Records, and Legal Counsel Records.

Roberts' environmental record is documented in the Environmental Project Records and the Natural Resources Records. Both of these series include topically arranged files covering a broad range of issues such as the Columbia River Gorge, the spotted owl, rivers and water, salmon and the restoration of fish runs, forest practices, and mining legislation.

Roberts decided not to seek re-election in 1994. Soon after she left office, Roberts accepted a position at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University as director of the Harvard Program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government and later as a senior fellow to the Women and Public Policy Program.

In 1998 Roberts joined Portland State University's Hatfield School of Government's Executive Leadership Institute as Associate Director of Leadership Development. Her first major leadership program began operation in September 1999 and was called the "Legacy Program."