



## Oregon State Archives

800 Summer Street NE

Salem, OR 97310

503-373-0701 ext. 1

[sos.oregon.gov/archives](http://sos.oregon.gov/archives)

# GOVERNOR JOHN A. KITZHABER ADMINISTRATION

## Inaugural Address, 1995

Source: Inaugural Address Governor, John A. Kitzhaber, Oregon, 1995

IN accepting the honor and assuming the duties of this high office, I do no more and no less than thirty-three men – and one extraordinary woman – have done before me.

So in a sense, this occasion is no different from the advent of any new administration, and it's difficult to say anything that hasn't been said before.

I might say that this is a new beginning. But each day is a new beginning.

I must say that these are difficult times. But other t times have also been difficult.

I might say that, as Oregon's elected officials, we have a solemn obligation to act. But every elected official has that obligation.

I might say that history will judge us by our deeds. But when has history not done so?

Any of these things I might say. All of them are true. None of them sets us apart, or makes us any different from those who have gone before.

The only way we can be different is to make a difference. That is what we have been sent here to do.

The people of Oregon have placed on us two clear and urgent demands? To live within our means, and to carry out the legitimate work of state government by providing certain essential services.

If we are to make any difference at all, we must?

- Provide for a good, stable school system from pre-Kindergarten through higher education.

- Provide for the public safety provide f or our vulnerable citizens whenever possible by helping them help themselves.

Provide good systems to transportation and telecommunications to support our economy.

And we must do all this with the money we now have.

The budget I am submitting to the 68th legislature does meet these demands. But compete success hinges on two other factors?

---

First if we are not to raise taxes, then we need an economy that thrives – not just in the Willamette Valley, but everywhere in Oregon – to provide the revenue to fund essential services. In the next several days I will be announcing detailed strategies to accomplish just that.

Second, we need a government that performs more effectively, more efficiently, and above all more accountably that it has ever had to do before.

I will hold government employees – myself included – accountable for meeting clear performance standards that can be measured.

And I will insist that all state employees reorient programs in ways that sustain economic growth and safeguard our quality of life.

All this we can do. But it will not be enough as long as we value today more than tomorrow, as long as we attack symptoms, while causes spread like a plague, as long as we are content to trade one set of problems for another, and call it a “solution,” and as long as we insist that the ways we differ are more important than the things we share.

We can make no progress until we rededicate ourselves to these plain truths? That Oregon’s whole is greater than the sum of its parts; that blind self-interest is not just bad morals – it’s bad economics; and (as I’ve said before) that Oregon cannot be a good place for any of us to live until it is a good place for all of us to live.

Of course we’ll have our differences. But we do agree on many issues that will shape our future?

-The need to end the school dining crisis.

-The need to attack the root causes of juvenile crime.

-The need to keep our economy moving, so all Oregonians have the opportunity for jobs and the pride and security that come with them.

-And the need to manage Oregon’s growth in ways that do not degrade our unmatched quality of life.

These issues affect all Oregonians, regardless of political party, regardless of ethnic background, or religion, or sexual orientation. They affect all of us – wherever we live or work or go to school – and they cannot be solved without cooperation. That means we must stop ceding power to groups and individuals that draw their life-blood and their livelihood for mourning Oregonians against each other. Our success depends on our willingness to respect our differences, on our willingness to strive to understand other points of view, and on our willingness to recognize that our most critical challenges have nothing to do with partisan politics and everything to do with the future of Oregon – our future.

The great lesson of our pioneer heritage is not just about perseverance and hard work; it’s about a rare blending of individual strength and community spirit. It’s about men and women with the wisdom to use diversity as a building block, not a stumbling block – and never as a weapon. It is that spirit and that wisdom that we need to recapture. And the time to do so is NOW.

It makes no difference whether the challenges we face are greater than ever before; we still must meet and surmount them. It makes no difference whether the legislature and the governor are of different political parties; we still have a job to do – not as Republicans or Democrats, but as Oregonians. And we will do that job despite the difficulty, despite the popularity polls, despite the pressures of any special interest.

---

So today I call on President Smith, on Speaker Clarno, on the other members of the legislature, and on every single Oregonian to join me in this pledge:

We will not sink to partisan bickering.

We will not postpone action in order to preserve political power.

We will not put personal gain above public trust.

We will not trade one set of problems for another.

Nor will we pile up superficial gains for the present, letting the future like a bewildered, abandoned child feed for itself.

Above all, will not pretend there's an easy answer to all our problems, or that we can solve everything with no pain and no sacrifice.

Instead we will be honest with ourselves and with each other. We will balance today's urgent needs with tomorrow's imperative necessities. All it will take is a little common sense and some uncommon wisdom.

Only then will we deserve the trust we asked for when we entered the campaign of 1994. Only then can we begin to restore people's faith in government and in democracy itself. Only then will "progress" be more than a word. Only then will we be worthy not just to be lead or legislate but to live in this magnificent state of Oregon at all.

Two months ago, at the polls, we proved we could gain a victory. Now, in the trenches, we must prove that we know how to use it wisely for the good of the many, not just the few; for the benefit of tomorrow's children, not just for ourselves today.

This day offers a breathing space, before our real work begins – a time to recollect, to reconnect, to reassess and to rededicate ourselves to the solemn trust that's been placed in our hands.

Tomorrow, we will take up our task, mindful that whatever we do or leave undone will send ripples through and endless succession for days, touch, for better or for worse, the lives of those who come after us.

So let us dare to be different – to make a difference. Let us boldly proclaim a new kind of progress – the kind we too often pay lip service to, and too seldom translate into action. The kind of progress that considers more than our own private interests, but understands that the welfare of others is vital to our own. The kind of progress that does not regard compromise as weakness. The kind of progress that sees diversity not as a threat, but as a treasure; an opportunity to enrich and strengthen the fabric of our society. The kind of progress that values timeless principles over transient popularity – principles like truth and honor and courage and compassion and service and sacrifice. These will remain, when wealth and worldly power and popular opinion are dust upon the wind.

And they are more than high-sounding rhetoric, more than outworn virtue with no place in the modern world. Without them, we may endure but we will never prevail. And we have a choice.

Today we stand perilously close to the brink of a chasm, and all our minds and all our energies have been concentrated on avoiding a fall. But with courage and honesty, with cooperation and balance, we can again find ourselves poised on the wings of promise to take flight toward our highest aspirations.

---

And why not? Why not?

WE dwell in a rare and lonely place, where the flame of hope is not yet extinguished. More than half century ago, a visitor here said that Oregon was as close as man could come to paradise on earth. I believe Oregon's greatness can rival its natural beauty. Working with each other, not against each other, we've see this state rise out of the unblemished land, a bright beacon of hope on America's western rim, a tribute to community spirit and individual strength alike, and a credit and model to the nation

My friends, we walk this path together. As long as we live within these borders, and share in the blessings and bounties of this small green corner of God's earth, we owe something in return. We owe something to each other. What we get, we must give back in equal measure. Let us begin today –

one state . . . one people . . . one destiny.