



## Oregon State Archives

800 Summer Street NE

Salem, OR 97310

503-373-0701 ext. 1

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### GOVERNOR VICTOR G. ATIYEH ADMINISTRATION

January 8, 1979 to January 12, 1987

#### Legislative Message, 1985

Source: Legislative Message Governor Victor Atiyeh, Oregon, 1985

Mister President, Madam Speaker, Members of the Sixty – third Legislative Assembly, Fellow Oregonians...

Six years ago I stood before you and shared with you my vision for this state which I love so very much.

On that day in 1979 I told you ... and I told all Oregonians ... of my hopes for the future, of my pride and confidence in our government, and of my dreams for the people of my state.

It was my first address to you.

Since that time 2,197 tomorrows have turned into yesterdays.

These yesterdays, in which this historic chamber witnessed three regular and seven special sessions of the Oregon Legislature, are now history none of us can recover or change.

WE must not look at a new set of tomorrows.

As history recalls those yesterdays it will certainly note that we kept faith with our constitution, with our laws and with the people of our state.

WE were precise in balancing and rebalancing our state budget to live within our means.

WE were flexible in adapting to changing economic and social conditions.

WE were vigorous in responding to the demands of preserving the heritage of Oregon as a national environmental leader.

Indeed, those 2,197 days have tested Oregon and Oregonians as never before.

However, we not only survived our yesterdays ... but our energy, our creativity and our perseverance also established a diamond-hard base in which to build our tomorrows.

WE confronted emerging challenges.

We creatively fashioned realistic solutions.

We clearly identify a positive new direction for our state of Oregon.

As this assembly begins to perform the important work of the people, I will present to you a broad legislative program to guarantee that Oregon will continue to move confidently into the future.

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This program will provide significant assistance to local communities in fighting the critical demands of deteriorating infrastructure.

It will further protect our most precious resource from the loathsome crime of child abuse.

This program will strengthen Oregon's balanced stewardship of its perilously limited water resource.

And there will be more.

But in the limited time available this morning I do not intend to give you a litany of my proposals.

Instead, I wish to speak to the undisputed number-one issue you must decide.

I want to challenge you, to exhort you, to energize you into traveling the road that will lead us to a bright new day in the lives of the citizens of our state of Oregon.

Historians will detail our singular efforts in concluding a statewide land-use plan that stands as a national landmark.

Future generation will admire our foresight in fighting for the preservation and orderly development of the magnificent national treasure we know as the Columbia River Gorge.

Writers will record our commitment to our human resource through creation of Oregon Food Share, the first statewide food bank in the nation.

History will recall the empathy we showed for our senior citizens in creating a division to help them maintain their dignity, their health and their homes in their golden years.

Another generation will remember our uncompromising statement that religious and racial harassment are offensive to Oregonians and will be tolerated nowhere within our borders.

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History will reflect the safety we have brought to our highways by writing and enforcing though new laws against drunken driving. Our legacy to the future will include our commitment to the creative arts and to our unique heritage by our increased support for the Oregon Arts Commission and our strong support for historic preservation.

The record will show that in response to the worst economic recession in a half century, the people of Oregon and their government fought back heroically.

But as I stand before you today in my final address to a regular session of this assembly, I know that history will also record a spectacular failure in meeting that which has been the number-one issue.

History will record we were no match for the paramount objective of permanently reducing the burden of local property taxes.

It will record we were unsuccessful in providing stable financing for our public schools.

It will record we did not complete our agenda for expanding, for stabilizing and for diversifying our time-dependent economy.

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In the proud history of our state, thirty-one other governors have delivered biennial messages as you ... the representatives of the people ... began the solemn responsibilities of statecraft.

As you begin your work today in this 126th year of Oregon statehood, it is worth remembering the issues, the ideas and the ideologies that will confront you are not new.

In 1959, Governor Mark Hatfield told this chamber the number-one problem in public education was finding a way to pay for it.

In 1967, Governor Tom McCall sounded the alarm of persistent citizen demands for relief from the growing weight of local property taxes.

In 1977, Governor Bob Straub spoke about an undependable system of educational finance in which classrooms were silenced in several Oregon communities.

Today ... a quarter-century later ... these challenges are still with us.

Nothing constructive and permanent has been done.

Why:

Did those legislatures lack consensus?

Did the people of our state lack consensus?

Did we become diverted by personal agendas that produced division rather than solutions?

Each of us might respond differently to these questions.

But on one question we should by now be unanimous.

Today we can enact a fairer way to finance our schools.

Today we can answer the demands of our citizens for permanent relief from local property taxes.

Today we can ensure that no Oregon school district ever again is forced to close.

The delicately balanced elements of this extraordinary opportunity are like the celestial alignment that permits us to see Halley's Comet only once in a lifetime.

This is a unique opportunity Oregon has not seen before and that we are unlikely ever to see again.

\*Oregon is led by a governor who has broken 26 years of uninterrupted opposition to support a state wide sales tax.

\*Oregon enjoys an unusual agreement among its legislative leadership that a statewide sales tax is a necessary, desirable and achievable solution.

\*Oregon boasts a building consensus among diverse constituencies that will put us on a fast track to solving a decades-old problem.

\*Oregon has before it a solution that boldly marshals a balanced attack on the clearly related issues of education, of tax reform, and of jobs.

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\*Most important, Oregon has a responsible citizenry that is willing to take a fresh look at a new approach to an old dilemma that demands a solution now.

Only after I concluded there was no other acceptable alternative for a meaningfully reducing local property taxes...

Only after I determined this was the best way to buy excellence in education while also generating more jobs for Oregonians...

Then...and only then...did I conclude the state of Oregon must enact a statewide sales tax to secure the future of our great state.

You must seize this unique moment in our history.

Oregonians must recognize only three alternatives exist for reducing local property taxes.

Two of these alternatives are clearly unacceptable.

The first is to pass alone-and-a-half percent property-tax limitation that would, with certainty, baring economic calamity to our state.

No Oregonian really wants to live with those disastrous consequences.

The second alternative is to crow Oregon as the undisputed income-tax capital of the nation by increasing our state income tax by more than half.

That is absolutely unacceptable in a state trying desperately to attract and hold employer who will create jobs for its people

Clearly, the only remaining alternative is to lock carefully written sales-tax language into our state constitution where only the people will have control of it.

The sales tax is a critical component of a comprehensive plan thoughtfully fashioned...

\*to improve instruction for our students

\*to reduce property taxes for our citizens

\*and to accelerate the creation of new jobs for Oregonians

The patient taxpayers of our state demand relief from local property taxes that is prompt, dramatic and permanent.

The plan before you will deliver that relief.

The concerned parents of our sate demand measurable objectives to prepare their children for a future of increasing complexity.

The plan before you will deliver objectives that meet these modern challenges.

The hard-working men and women of Oregon...and the men and women who still only wish they could find work...demand that we deepen and diversify our reservoir of secure jobs.

The plan before you will substantially deepen that reservoir.

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Virtually every citizen in our state demands that we stabilize the method by which we finance our public schools and that we also strictly limit the inexorable escalation of local property taxes.

The plan before you meets each of these legitimate demands.

Never the less, the sales tax has built an enduring record of opposition among the voters of the state of Oregon.

As a former long-time opponent of sales tax. I have carefully reviewed and seriously responded to the arguments of the opponents.

This plan needs the demands of citizens who have told us they will not accept a new tax without the replacement of an old tax.

There are those who ask whether this plan will sufficiently limit the growth of local property taxes.

To them I say...yes, this plan restricts property-tax growth even more rigidly than any other plan ever put before you.

There are those who ask whether will limit the growth of education spending on Oregon.

To them I say...yes, limiting the flow of revenue to our schools is absolutely the best means of restricting spending in our schools.

There are those who ask whether revenues from a sales tax should be dedicated to all levels of public education.

To them I say...yes, we must be flexible in the future to be able to put dollars where the need is greatest in order to maintain an integrated system of education from kindergarten through graduate school

There are those who ask whether a sales tax can be fair to Oregonians living on fixed and low income.

To them I say...yes, this plan goes forward to exempt everyday purchases from a sales tax, and to rebate sales taxes to low-income Oregonians, than any other plan in the history of our state.

There are those who favor a sales tax but who ask if we should not also reduce state income taxes.

To them I say...yes, I have already recommended a substantial income-tax reduction for the 1985-87 biennium with a clear pledge that income taxes can be reduced still further in the future.

Finally, there are those who ask if it is wise to eliminate the so-called "30 percent" program of property-tax relief.

To them I say. Yes, this program was a bad idea when it was enacted.

This is an anemic program that does absolutely nothing to retard the growth of local property taxes.

This as a program that, in fact has been a major contributor to obscene increase in the property tax.

This is an ill-conceived program that must not be perpetuated for another biennium.

The road that stretches before us is one that can easily be strewn either conflict, with controversy and with connection.

You know that I understand that.

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But we must not fail to travel this road to the destiny we honestly seek for the people of our state.

I pledge to you, without reservation, my total commitment to cooperate with you as a partner in working together, in planning together and in fighting together to win this battle.

We must be resolved in our determination to succeed.

We must be equally resolute in our commitment to communicate with one another.

WE cannot afford to become deadlocked in divisiveness that will drag us still further from our ultimate goal that now is so clearly attainable.

If there is anyone in this chamber who hold different ideas for getting this job done, we must begin talking immediately.

My office is available and is open to all of you.

We cannot permit a single day to pass in which we should have communicated with another but did not do so.

WE must also communicate actively with the people who sent us here.

Together, we must resolve to carry our message to the wheat grower in eastern Oregon with the same enthusiasm that we carry it to the editors in southern Oregon.

We must resolve to carry it to the service station attendant in Mitchell with the same fervor that we deliver it to the City Club in Portland.

As legislators whose authority springs from the people, yours is a proud task and an honorable responsibility.

You asked the people to let you represent them.

The people responded by saying yes, represent me.

During this legislative session, you will see or hear from no more than a tiny minority of Oregonians...perhaps no more than 2 or 3 percent.

There will be two-million, five hundred-thousand you will not see or hear from.

But you must never forget their wishes.

You must never neglect their unexpressed demands.

You must never ignore their unspoken dreams.

You represent them as much as those who will walk these halls.

The Oregon Legislature is not a game to be played for the sport of seeing which one of you wins or loses.

Instead, it is a serious business in which the only winners or losers will be the people of this state who have endued their representatives with a sacred trust.

A decade ago, Barbara Tuchman described history as "the unfolding of miscalculation."

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But today none of us can afford...nor will I tolerate...any miscalculation in charting the future of our state of Oregon.

We cannot afford to have future generation look back on this unique period in our history and say that we miscalculated.

None of us wished future generations to remember ours as that which shirked a responsibility, which dismissed an obligation, which turned loose of an opportunity that might never appear again.

Instead, we desire future generations to remember our deeds...even if they forget our names...for our vision of unprecedented economic opportunity.

Today we must seize this unique moment of opportunity.

As a result of the 2,197 days that have delivered us to this extraordinary opportunity, we now stand at an historic crossroads.

Today we may choose either of two roads that will ease us two different kinds of tomorrows.

Without actually traveling down either of them, I can see vividly where they will lead.

The first road is clearly posted.

It leads to a sparkling future not unlike that of the legendary city with its streets paved of gold.

This road leads to more jobs, to more prosperity and to a diversified, brighter future for Oregonians.

This road leads to better and more stable education for our children.

Now, let us look down the second road.

That road is posted just as clearly.

But it leads to a real city where the streets may not be paved at all.

That road leads to lost industries, to lost jobs and to the loss of our future.

That road leads to deterioration in the schooling of our children and, sadly, to silent schoolyards.

That road leads to a dangerous property-tax limitation that will bring more misery than our state has ever experienced.