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GOVERNOR BARBARA ROBERTS ADMINISTRATION

January 14, 1991 to January 9, 1995

Inaugural Message, 1991

Source: Inaugural Address Governor Barbara Roberts, Oregon, 1991

In 1865 a bright and brave 13-year-old girl, Harriet Hitchcock, began a journey across the Oregon Trail with her family. Today, as I begin my journey as your Governor, I want to share some of Harriet's own words with you.

"This morning," she wrote, "We commenced to climb the snowy range...and we soon found the tug of war in our journey was only just begun. WE could see the top of one hill and thing that was the last, But when we gained that, others kept rising before us. To look back, in retreat, seemed utterly out of the question. To look forward was to look directly upwards, as the ascent seemed almost perpendicular. But remembering our motto, "perseverance", we doubled our teams and went on. At last, when all hope has nearly left us, we found ourselves on top of that beautiful range

... We felt that we were monarchs of all we surveyed."

Those words capture what Oregon immigrants experienced as they made their grueling trek over the Oregon Trail nearly 150 years ago.

Today, I honor the memory of those brave settlers of Oregon, and pay tribute, as well, to the Native Americans already inhabiting this land before pioneers like my great-great-grandparents arrived here in the mid-1800's.

Such dreams those pioneers had for this territory. Some instinct drew them here, a fate a pulling, a desire for deep and lasting change in their lives. They embraced that change. They sought it out.

Theirs was a quest for new horizons, for new beginnings. For a new homeland. They rode. They walked. They staved. They forge. And they died. But they kept their eyes westward. They gave us Oregon.

And their dream is my dream? That as Governor of this state, when my term is complete, we will have traveled along this generation's Oregon trail and come to a better home.

And 150 years from now, as future generations look back on our journey, how will they see us?

Will they see us as pioneers?

Will they marvel at our ingenuity?

Or will they scoff at our feeble attempts to keep our balance as the old and new Oregon collide and spin into the 21st century.

Will they speak of our courage, our creativity, our care and stewardship of the future?

Or will they see us as short-sighted, self-centered, greedy, timid?

For each generation has but one chance to be judged by future generations and this is our time.

So let me be very clear. I do not wish to be judged as an Oregonian who made decisions isolated from the future.

I will make choices. I will take chances.

I will take positions and even draw lines in the sand to advocate for the long range solution over the quick fix.

I will begin today with a commitment to invest in and enhance Oregon's human assets and Oregon's natural assets. And as I work for a better Oregon, I don't want you cheering me on – from the sidelines.

Oregon's future is not a spectator sport.

We're all in this together. This is our time.

We must not be afraid of change. "Because we've always done it that way" is not a valid excuse for anything.

I'd love to stop talking about what Oregonians won't accept and begin discussing with you what you will accept.

I want to be able to tell you the complete and honest facts about our state.

I want to be able to brag when we get one right.

I want to be able to tell you straight out when I make a mistake.

I want to feel I can tell you, just as bluntly, when I think you've made a choice that isn't good for Oregon.

And to be frank, I may only be allowed one term as governor. So be it. For my only desire, as your governor, from this day forward, is to lead Oregon along this trail to a better place than where we started.

My decisions will be based on what's best for Oregon. The Barbara Roberts administration will be one of openness, of truthfulness, of accountability.

I will be tuned to the next generation, not the next election.

For while history may record my words, it will be my actions and their impact on future generations that is remembered.

Fate has given me a difficult time to lead Oregon – with Measure Five, our changing timber economy, and exploding population, a federal government pushing unfunded responsibilities on state government shoulders.

But I have no need to hide from tough choices.

I have no desire to take short cuts.

I have no fear that the task before me is insurmountable.

I have no sense that I am in this alone.

We will come out on the other side – stronger, better, more healthy, more diverse, more Oregon.

This is my time. This is our time.

For I will tell you this, Oregonians.

Future generations will remember our words.

They will feel our actions.

And they will judge us by our souls.

There is an old Chinese curse – “may you live in interesting times.”

Well, interesting times are clearly ours. But beyond the challenges that I face, that this legislature faces, that we face as Oregonians, this particular time has another facet that is not immediately obvious.

History records for us unique fact about the final ten years of a century. Time and time again, in the history of governments, of nations, of states, the final decade of a century – dates such as 1492 – lead to monumental change, change so profound that its impact reaches far into the next century.

Oregon is no exception.

Consider this. It was in 1792 – the last decade of the 18th century – that Robert Gray first say the murky water swelling into the Pacific Ocean from what is now known as the Columbia River.

A decade later, spurred by gray’s discovery, serious efforts by the United States government to populate the Oregon territory began with the Lewis and Clark expedition.

The discovery of the Columbia River in the final decade of the 18th century led the way into the 19th century.

One hundred years later, in 1898, William U’ren and his direct legislation league sought to eliminate the political corruption plaguing Oregon.

They paved the way for the nation’s first initiative and referendum legislating that followed in the early 1900’s.

The ability of Oregonians to petition and place issues on the ballot, the ability of Oregonians to govern themselves – was the major contribution of the 1890s to our century.

It was the initiative process that gave Oregon our primary election system for presidential candidates, the 8-hour work day, protection of our state’s scenic rivers, the citizen’s utility board and yes, the right of Oregon women to act their ballots in every election.

And it was also that movement of self-legislation which led to the passage in November of ballot measure five. Now, some may argue that this fundamental change in how we fund education and the corresponding decrease in property taxes will be the major contribution of the 1990’s to the next century.

I disagree.

I certainly can’t argue that Oregon now faces a critical challenge to the future of our state. We know we must respond to the wishes of a citizenry committed to property tax relief and government accountability.

I agree.

But I believe when Oregonians feel the weight of the tax they wielded in November, they will realize they did far more than give themselves a tax break. They will have cost other Oregonians their lives, and their livelihood. And I believe, in the end, the citizens of this state will rightly decide our investment in the future of Oregon, in our children and grandchildren, demands a more responsible version of major property tax relief.

The budget I have presented to the legislature encompasses accountability, belt – tightening and a responsible answer to the Oregon electorate.

And as we move toward the following biennium, I will ask Oregon voters to show that same accountability, to choose a responsible answer for Oregon's future.

This administration will not be consumed by Ballot Measure Five.

WE understand its implications and its limitations and we will deal decisively with those issues. But Ballot Measure Five will not be the battering ram that some expect it to be. It will not topple this administration. Nor will I allow it to cripple state government.

And it will not prevent me from reaching forward to the Oregon I believe we all want to see in the year 2000.

Ask yourself this, Oregonians, do we want our children stumbling into the next century...Or racing into it, prepared, heads held high, sure of themselves, sure and proud of Oregon?

My vision of Oregon begins with hope. It begins with an acceptance of each one of us for who we are. It knows no prejudice toward color, or ethnic background, or gender.

My ideal Oregon – like the Oregon settled 150 years ago – brings together diverse people and provides them the opportunity to live and work and grow together.

In my vision of Oregon, I see a well-prepared, fully-employed workforce earning good family wages. I see a healthy economy constantly diversifying, and economy that cherishes and nourishes our natural resources and wisely uses – not abuses – our land and our air and our water. Imagine an economic climate where “profits” and “workers” are both spoken of with mutual respect.

I'll reach for an Oregon where the basic needs of health care and housing both become accessible; where a person in need isn't forgotten, an act of injustice isn't tolerated and a day in school isn't wasted.

I want a government that is lean, but not mean: a government that embraces the best tenets of Oregon business and the true spirit of the Oregon family.

I'll work for a state government where planning, management and thrift share equal billing with compassion, respect and commitment – the best of business, the best of family.

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This is my vision for Oregon's future.

But a governor must do more than offer a vision. A governor – a leader but of those categories. Though creation of the Oregon progress board, with innovative tools like the Oregon benchmarks, under the banner

of his “Oregon comeback”, Neil provided a path that has served us well on the first leg of our journey into the next venture.

But my strongest memory of Neil during his four years as our Governor will always be the mental snapshots of him and our Oregon children: legs crossed, sitting on the floor reading to first-graders; wearing funny disguises and letting children paint his face at a kid’s fair; hugging little children, inspiring high schoolers, running and laughing and kidding the kids.

He brought us the children’s agenda. But it was far more than an idea or a budget item or a plan for his term.

He was the children’s agenda. That doesn’t end for him today.

It shouldn’t end for any of us. For your leadership and vision, thank you Neil.

And now we must move forward, again.

Oregon’s citizens have expectations of their state government. I have expectations of our citizens and communities. And, in reality, government only works well when it is an accord between its elected leaders and its people.

It is time to concentrate on rebuilding the partnership between citizens and leaders – to refine the reaffirm the Oregon accord.

Only in this way will we be prepared to face the challenges of the future together.

Oregon is beginning to face tremendous challenges to its livability – a tax system out of balance, crime, lack of access to health care, housing shortages, environmental problems, urban growth – challenges that require real solutions. My job as governor – as the facilitator of the Oregon accord – is to lead that search for solutions.

I believe there are three key area where Oregon needs immediate and measurable progress: in developing a better prepared workforce, in keeping Oregon and its communities liable under the pressures of growth and change, and in overhauling Oregon’s tax structure to guarantee major property tax relief while assuring funding for our children’s education and investment in our future.

A PREPARED OREGON WORKFORCE

IN pioneer days the term workforce meant strong backs and rugged constitution to carve farms and communities out of the wilderness. Today it means vastly more. It means highly-technical scientists. It means qualified service workers. It means highly-technical scientists. It means qualified service works. It means people who can move straight from school into the workforce. And yes, it still means strong backs to perform manual labor. And in the future, in the 21st century. It will mean more of the same, and far beyond. A qualified workforce twenty years from now will include jobs we can’t even envision today. Technological advances are so rapid it takes constant efforts just to keep pace.

I know we want to be the best. We need to be the best. And we need a strong strategy, clear direction and innovate leadership now if we are to be the best tomorrow.

Our workforce programs today are scattered throughout state government; nine agencies in all – separate and equal, each doing an adequate job on its own. But we can and must do better

Today I am announcing my commitment to the “Oregon workforce development plan.” This plan will bring together affected state agencies under a blueprint, under a strategic plan to coordinate services and ensure

that we are doing the best possible job in preparing Oregonians to function effectively in a changing marketplace.

If it means giving a single mother on welfare job training and help with child care so when can work, the workforce plan will make it happen. It may mean retraining some timber workers for new and better employment. And that should come under the jurisdiction of my workforce plan. When it means expanding programs like head start and making sure every Oregon child is literate in reading, math and foreign languages, I'll look to the workforce plan to move us on that path.

I want to bring in the brightest minds in business, economics, local governments, service providers and labor to help formulate our strategy. And then we'll go out and implement our plan with innovative approaches.

We'll use the newly developed Oregon benchmarks our blueprint, so every program is accountable. We'll take our federal allocations and use them in our strategies – in an Oregon strategy – to build our workforce's effectiveness. Instead of relying on the federal government to tell us what to do, we'll be setting the national example for how to do it.

This won't be a point developed and isolated in Salem, unaware of what's really appending around the state. Regional help will provide us with input and direction, tell us what each community needs to build a workforce that is prepared, motivated, stable, and properly rewarded – workers who are considered the best in the nation.

LIVABLE OREGON COMMUNITIES

My second key initiative will be livable communities.

Think back to the first time you saw Oregon. I don't necessarily mean when you first arrived there or your earliest childhood memory. I mean the first time you really saw Oregon, that first awakening of the beautiful and unique treasure we are so proud to call home. It is cleverly described by Ken Metzler in his book, *The Best Of Oregon*.

"Growing up in Oregon," he writes, "is like growing up with a scraggly kid sister.

You wonder why everybody suddenly admired her so.

Did she mysteriously become gorgeous when you weren't looking."

And listen now to another first view of Oregon from an 1864 trail diary.

"Beautiful waterfalls cascading down craggy mountains, spreading their silvery veils, forming the most beautiful mist and rainbows, then dashing on through wooded ravines where trailing vines and ferns are kept in perpetual greenness."

Each of us has our own personal moment when we truly "discovered" our state. And each of us today bears a responsibility to ensure that future generations are able to capture their moment as well.

And there is no issue which will so dramatically impact Oregon's beauty and its livability over the next quarter century as our population growth – from Beaverton to Bend to Bandon.

With over 300,000 new Oregonians expected in this decade, our way of life is at risk. And there are no easy solutions. Our neighbors to the north and south are laboratories of growth experiments gone bad. Successful examples of planning, designing, investing and implementing for growth are practically non-existent.

So Oregon must forge its own enduring instruments in the head of land use planning, community transportation and environmental protection.

Now I know land use planning isn't always met with standing ovations. But the alternative is a nightmare called "Seattle sprawl:" endless suburbs, clogged sewers and freeways, farms and forests supplanted by parking lots surrounded by mega malls.

And the keys to improving our land use laws must be slicing the secondary lands question, protecting our prime farm and forest acreage, coordinating transportation with land use and guiding development sensibly and carefully in every part of Oregon.

A viable Oregon with health communities will emerge from such high standards of growth and environmental commitment. And make no mistake, planned growth, plus conserving and protecting our natural resources is entirely compatible, with developing a healthy, sustainable state economy.

Oregon will show the nation it can be done.

OVERHAULING OREGON'S TAX SYSTEM

The third key area I want to talk about today should come as no surprise to any citizen in Oregon. I fancy, I've been commenting on it for so long that I hesitated to include it in my first speech as Governor.

But to ignore the subject of overhauling Oregon's tax structure is to ignore the basic ingredient necessary to keeping Oregon, Oregon.

The subject of taxation is always dangerous territory. It is rife with controversy, frustration, anger, misunderstanding, parochial positions and oversimplifies solutions. So let me state, first, the few taxation facts where most Oregonians can find agreement: The way we pay for public schools in Oregon is a mess.

*Property taxes are too high.

*It's better if someone else pays the taxes.

*Income taxes are too high.

*And you can't trust those politicians when they come up with a tax plan.

But after agreeing on all of those statements, a huge majority of Oregonians are still waiting for a satisfactory solution.

And I am ready to offer the first building blocks to a tax overhaul for Oregon. Nothing fancy. Nothing over-complicated. Nothing you haven't heard before and nothing we can't accomplish if you're really ready to get it done.

Property taxes are too high. Let's take the cost of schools completely off the property tax.

Local communities should be able to have adequate funding for fire protection, libraries, law enforcement, streets and safe water. Let's let them use our property tax for those needs, but with a realistic cap on growth.

State government runs our prison system, higher education, economic development, agriculture and forest research, consumer protection, mental health institutions, highway construction and courts. It makes sense to use our income tax dollars for those major programs that serve us all.

So I propose to use a sales tax dedicated to education to give major property tax relief, take the pressure off the income tax, let the state government do the job of investing in our future and get on with Oregon's life.

A sales tax is not evil. A sales tax, like any other tax, is as good and fair as its design.

My sales tax is an Oregon sales tax with tamper-proof, iron-clad constitutional protections for Oregon citizens. It would exempt food, housing, utilities and medical care. It would have a low income tax credit. It would be limited to 5%. It would be dedicated to schools.

NO gimmicks, no tricks, no lies: no way the legislature, the governor of the state bureaucracy could take away those positional protections.

Oregon must get on with the responsibility of education our children. We must be able to build roads and sewers and housing for a growing population. We must be prepared to take advantage of an economic horizon just opening to western states. There is no miracle to make these things happen unless we are prepared to act.

Please don't close you mind or eyes or your heart to this conversation I plan to have in communities in every part of Oregon.

Measure five is not the answer. It will slowly – over the next 6 years – cripple Oregon and put it permanently on the economic back burner. We must not, we cannot, let that happen.

Sometime between November of this year and may of 1992 I would like you to have an opportunity to reevaluate the decision Oregon made on measure five. I would like you to listen carefully to the importance this change could make for all of Oregon. I would like you to believe that I have Oregon's best interest at heart and that I will tell you honestly what such a tax overhaul will mean for you and your community.

If you will really listen, I cannot ask for more than that.

Because, in the end, as I said in the beginning, government is an accord between you elected leaders and you, as citizens. In the end we are all in this together. This is our time.

A little while ago I told you my vision for the future. I outlines my key initiatives – a better prepared workforce. Sensitive and sensible growth and an overhaul of our worn-out Oregon tax structure.

But until this moment, I've omitted the most crucial ingredient" without the people, the bread wont' rise.

Over the past two decades we have changed. We live at a dizzying pace. We're bombarded by bulleting and billboards, told what to do by television and technology. And even today threatened with war. We struggle so hard to make sense of today's world that we tend to become the audience rather than the actors.

We settle in and settle down. Sometimes we settle for less. Because it's easier. Because we feel overwhelmed. Because we don't think we can really make a difference.

Well, let me beg to differ.

A week from today we celebrate the birthday of a man who was the epitome of involvement, a man who dared to be great. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Believed everyone of us could make a difference.

Dr. King wrote, "everybody can be great. Because anybody can serve. You don't have to have a college degree to serve. You don't have to make you subject and you verb agree to serve. You don't have to know about Plato and Aristotle to serve. You don't have to know Einstein's theory of relativity to serve. You don't

have to know the second theory of thermodynamics to serve. You only need a heart full of grace. . A soul generated by love.”

“Sure,” you say, “anyone with the eloquence and grace of a Martin Luther King can serve. But what about the rest of us?”

You are looking at a woman who raised two children – one of the autistic – by herself. You are looking at a person who struggled for years to make ends meet. You are looking at a part-time student still working and committed to earning my college degree. And you are looking at a woman who got actively involved because she saw a wrong that needed to be orated. And today you are looking at the governor of the greatest state in the union. Am I proud? You bet I am.

Will I make a difference for Oregon? I’ve never wished more for anything.

Can any one of you do it? You bet you can.

For each generation has but one change to be judged by future generations. And this is our time.