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GOVERNOR ROBERT W. STRAUB ADMINISTRATION

January 13, 1975 to January 8, 1979

Legislative Message, 1977

Source: Legislative Address Governor Robert Straub, Oregon, 1977

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the 59th Legislative Assembly, distinguished guests, fellow citizens:

Two years ago I addressed the Oregon Legislature for the first time.

Today, we are about to embark on another legislative session . . . and a chance to share in a common goal:

“Building a better state in which we live.”

ON this occasion, it is customary for the Governor to review the past two years of his Administration.

We have done some things right . . . and we know it.

WE have done some things wrong . . . and we know that also.

But we continue to move ahead.

WE continue because we know the kind of Oregon we want for our children . . . and our children’s children.

And we know what it will take to get there . . . hard work --- dedication --- and purpose.

The essential directions can be found in our deeply-held beliefs --- our vision and our values.

These beliefs can come only from the hearts of our citizens. During the past two years, I have and the privilege of listening to the heartbeat of the people of this state . . . at numerous town hall meetings . . . in meetings with business, environmental, social service and community leaders . . . and in visits with thousands of Oregonians.

These visits have provided me the chance to reaffirm those values which bind us together . . . Making us one of the strongest . . . most compassionate . . . most enlightened states in the nation.

Those values are . . . our concern for our fellow citizens . . . our love of the land and our natural resources . . . our need to lead productive, healthy lives . . . our sense of independence . . . and our commitment to environmental and cultural excellence.

The recommendation that I am submitting to this Legislature . . . in my budget and in suggested legislation . . . reflect those enduring values.

At this point, it is worth noting that our budget is delicately balanced between compassion and economy. It seeks maximum benefit from the financial resources we expect in the 1977-79 biennium.

And it promises no more than we can . . . or should . . . deliver.

OUR budget for the coming biennium reflects examples of the savings we will achieve . . . including holding line on state employment.

During the past decade, the average rate of growth in state employment was 8.4 percent every two years.

My budget however, reflects my determined effort to hold state employment growth to 1.6 percent in the next two years.

Our first budget consideration was to hold the line on taxes. My recommendations can be implemented with no new general tax increase.

We are --- like most of our citizens --- living within our means

Our second consideration was to provide some relief from the property tax burdens placed on our citizens.

And our third aim was to maintain the standards of service now provided the citizens of our state . . . so that we receive maximum benefit from each tax dollar expended.

Finally, we have offered essential new programs designed to enhance the well-being of our citizens . . . assist in the development of Oregon . . . and better manage our resource.

OUR most important resource is our Oregon citizen.

I am recommending a major increase in the level of state programs service "people needs."

More than 72 percent of our \$2 billion state general fund revenues has been allocated to . . . educating our young people . . . helping the handicapped and the disadvantaged . . . and "caring for those who cared for us" --- Oregon's senior citizens.

We have more than 370,000 elderly citizens in Oregon whose energy labor --- and willpower were dedicated to our future.

But for many of our senior citizens, their own future has been denied.

There is a cruel tarnish on their "golden years."

Their lifelong dream of dignity . . . comfort . . . and independence . . . has become a financial nightmare.

A nightmare of bare survival . . .

. . . Forcing a 75-year-old couple out of their home and away from their neighbors --- because they can no longer pay the taxes . . .

. . . denying a 65-year-old woman the simple luxury of being able to use her stove to bake bread . . .

. . . compelling a 72-year-old man to pick berries so that he and his 70-year-old wife can eat that day.

As a citizen, I am ashamed that these conditions exist.

As Governor, I intend to right these wrongs.

It is time to balance the books . . .

. . . time to repay the debt we owe to our senior citizens.

Our budget reflects the value we place on the lives of our elderly:

... \$4 million for elderly rent relief

... increased property tax relief

... \$10 million to help relieve the burden caused by escalating utility rates

... \$700,000 increase to continue Oregon's lead in Project Independence --- a service designed to keep the elderly in their homes and out of nursing homes.

... and finally, more than \$8 million for other programs designed to restore the glitter to the golden years.

I urge you support for these programs.

Just as the elderly built the Oregon of today ... the young will build the Oregon of tomorrow.

And that is just one reason why we must maintain an exceptional education system.

To begin with, I have budgeted \$129 million more for basic school support.

That will bring us to a level of 33 1/3 percent ... the highest level of school support in 15 years.

It is not enough ... we all know that.

But I believe it is a responsible allocation in light of our other important needs.

Last year school doors in Oregon were closed by local resident in four school districts.

It hurt me to see these doors slammed shut on our young people. As a parent I know that every day of learning that is lost ... is a lost opportunity.

Compassion and prudence --- not panic --- must be the means by which we address this crisis.

I am recommending to two-step approach to meet the educational demands on our time.

First --- I urge legislation which would provide a safety net for our school districts. This would insure an adequate operating budget to keep our school doors open.

Once we have provided this safety net, we can tackle the important task of developing a school finance proposal that will be acceptable ... understandable. . and approved at the polls.

I believe such a proposal must match more of the cost of schools from the "strangling" property tax onto the more equitable income tax.

We have labored long and hard to find the answer to the school finance dilemma.

During the past decade, the people of Oregon have voted on seven school finance proposals:

Each time they have said No.

This time we must succeed.

Providing for people is the most important commitment of my Administration. But there is another area that must also receive high priority . . . Oregon's natural resources.

Our recommendation is for an added emphasis on both forestry and land use planning. We are asking for an increase of more than \$13 million in these areas.

The Department of Forestry will benefit from a 27 percent increase in their budget to intensify our management of state and private timber lands.

Our commitment will be a doubling of harvest levels on small private holdings over the next 30 years.

And more than \$1.2 billion in state revenues by the year 2000 . . . as a result of harvesting on state lands.

The citizens of Oregon will receive the benefit from these increased revenues through the state common school fund and aid to out counties

WE will also profit from the completion of our comprehensive land-use planning process.

My goal is to have the entire State of Oregon planned and zoned by 1980.

To help achieve that goal --- at the local level, where it belongs --- I am coming more than two-thirds of the proposed budget of the Land Conservation and Development Commission to local jurisdictions.

Those grant funds --- for planning aid to cities and counties --- would be increased by more than 100 percent over the last biennium to \$7.6 million.

Successful implementation of Senate Bill 100 is a goal which we must reach to maintain our quality of life in Oregon.

An important part of that quality of life is jobs for our citizens.

Forest products is our major industry in Oregon. But without high yield forestry on our commercial forest lands . . . we could face a 22 percent decline in the timber cut by the year 2000.

Our major source of employment in Oregon now rests on a declining base.

That makes it absolutely necessary that we redouble our efforts to diversify our economy.

During the past two years, we have made some encouraging progress.

We have brought three new industries to Oregon. When all three of these industries are in operation, we will have 2,000 new jobs in such cities as Aloha . . . Astoria . . . and Klamath Falls.

Our budget for the Department of Economic Development reflects our commitment to do more.

WE have requested an increase of more than 60 percent --- from \$1 million in this biennium --- to \$1.6 million in the coming biennium.

We are presenting companion legislation which will improve pollution control credits . . .

. . . enhance our one-stop permit coordination efforts

. . . provide a revolving fund for loans to Port Districts for economic development projects

. . . and stimulate additional home construction.

I also ask for your speedy approval of the Port of Portland drydock enabling legislation.

AN important ingredient in both successful economic development and in our personal lives is energy.

During the past two years, we haven't faced long lines at the gas pump or electrical brownouts.

But we cannot be lulled into a false sense of security.

The fact is we are living in an energy-short environment with increasing costs.

And there is not relief in sight.

I am recommending action on two fronts.

First --- I am proposing three conservation bills designed to cut state energy demand by five percent over the next 10 years.

And second, I am recommending a Domestic and Rural Power authority to extend low cost Bonneville Power to all of our residential and rural customers.

This Power Authority would reduce the average utility bill of Oregon's rural and residential ratepayers by \$136 per year by the end of 1979.

John Kennedy said "The agenda is long and the time is short."

THE Oregon agenda is long and there is much to do.

Today, I have not touched upon some of the other important issues facing Oregon.

I have spoken to these concerns on numerous occasions. In the coming weeks I will submit issue reports to the Legislature covering my recommendations in these other important areas.

Part of our Oregon tradition has been the individual willingness of our elected leaders to speak their minds on issues of our time.

From Oswald west to Wayne Morse, we have supported the concept that one person --- with the forage of his or her convictions --- is a majority.

Today, I want to speak directly to you about my convictions on certain key issues facing this Legislature.

First --- the conservation and development of our land.

Last November, our commitment to sound, sensible land use planning received overwhelming approval.

The message was clear --- the people of Oregon want us to get the job done.

I believe it can be done under the existing law.

Some fine-tuning is needed . . . but the key principles of SB 100 must not be eroded or destroyed:

--- the right of citizens to appeal

--- the requirement that planning be done at the local level closest to the people.

--- and citizen involvement in the planning process.

The second important issue is the maintenance of Oregon's transportation lifelines.

I must report that our highway fund is in critical condition. It began with the energy crisis in 1973.

Our traditional reliance on a moderate, static gas tax to finance the build of our highway knees is threatening to place Oregon's lifelines on the list of endangered species.

There are those who still think the gas tax provides our highway fund with a bottomless pot of gold.

They are wrong.

Unless we act decisively in this Legislature, our enormous investment in thousands of miles of good roads will go down the drain.

The choice is between politics --- or statesmanship

... between the next election and the next generation.

The next issue is workmen's compensation.

Oregon's workmen's compensation system is a good system --- and we know it.

But it can be improved ... and we know that also.

I believe abuses in the system should be eliminated. But, eligible working men and women --- with legitimate claims --- must not lose one penny of their just benefits.

The fourth issue is revenue sharing with Oregon cities and counties.

I believe this is the right time to take a new look at the relationships between the state and our cities and counties.

Oregon's cities and counties must rely heavily on property taxes to finance needed services.

The demand for those services is increasing ... but the cost of providing those services is increasing at a much faster rate.

Inflation is taking a bigger and bigger bite out of city and county revenues.

The State could say this it is not our problem.. but that just isn't true.

Meeting the needs of our citizens is a shared obligation.

We simply cannot ignore the financial crisis facing our cities and counties.

I believe revenue sharing is a wise investment that will:

---put state dollars to work where people live

---help to build a strong ... stable ... and diverse economy

---protect the equity already at the local level through public and private investments

---insure that decision-making remains close to the people --- where it belongs

---and providing some relief for overburdened property taxpayers.

Finally, there is the issue of corrections.

I am opposed to building another concrete fortress with 20 foot walls at a cost of \$50 million.

I favor a policy which makes better use of our available resources --- as policy that insures that those who can be helped . . . are helped.

. . . and those who should be locked up . . . are locked up.

Some wish to go beyond the "lock up."

They favor the return to capital punishment.

Although I don't make a habit of threatening a veto, I believe I must be direct on this issue:

I do not believe society should deliberately take a human life.

If this Legislature passes a bill restoring capital punishment. . . .

I will veto it.

If it goes to the people for a vote ---

I will lead the fight to defeat it.

We have come too far in Oregon to move back into the dark ages.

I have had the honor today to speak to you of the values which are inherent in all of the citizens of this state.

WE all recognize that a budget is only for two years.

We also know that we must look not two year away . . . but have a vision of Oregon five . . . ten . . . twenty years from now.

Let me tell you of my vision . . . and the things I want for my children . . . and my children's children.

I want them to be able to share Pat's and my joy of backpacking in Oregon's magnificent wilderness area.

I want them to be able to float Oregon's wild rivers and experience their beauty . . . as we have done.

I want them to enjoy Oregon's unique communities which have protected and preserved their special heritage in both their buildings and their environment.

I want them to be able to visit our metropolitan areas and enjoy the excitement of these vibrant cultural . . . commercial . . . and human centers of Oregon.

I want them to breathe clean air . . . have clean water . . . and a clean land.

I want them to have equal opportunities to jobs in an economically strong Oregon.

I want them to enjoy the same values in the Oregon of tomorrow that brought Pat and me to this State 30 years ago.

And, finally, I want them --- and us --- to remember that Oregon was not built on fear . . .

But on courage, on imagination and the unbeatable determination to do the job at hand.

That job can be done --- must be done --- and it will be done.