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GOVERNOR VICTOR G. ATIYEH ADMINISTRATION

January 8, 1979 to January 12, 1987

Inaugural Message, 1979

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Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Members of the Sixtieth Legislative Assembly, Fellow Oregonians:

Four years ago we welcomed to his chamber the man who had defeated me for the office he occupied. Eight weeks ago he welcomed me to that office, the oath for which I have just taken.

Bob Straub, for the extraordinary cooperation of yourself and your staff in the recent transition, but more for you many years of dedicated public service to this state, I say --- on behalf of myself, my staff and the people of Oregon --- all of us thank you and Godspeed.

On a personal note, I share this day with many, any others, but most of all with my family, and especially the one who has been along on every hill and valley of the way . . . my wife Dolores.

It's a beautiful day in Oregon.

This is the greatest day of my life, and it could be a great day for all of you who share with me the highest honor --- and the greatest responsibility that our fellow Oregonians can confer . . . the stewardship of their system of law.

In the months ahead, you as legislators will be faced with thousands of decisions, thousands of judgments on how we in Oregon should live our lives. As only recently one of you, I know how easy it is to view the legislative agenda as a kaleidoscope, tumbling fragments of varying shapes and colors, each bearing little or no relation to the to her. A vote on energy may follow a hearing on criminal justice, a meeting with farmer may follow a debate on municipal bonding. IN this kaleidoscope, a unity of design, a consistency of principle, is very elusive.

I have previously offered you and, in the days ahead, will continue to present to you, specific legislative proposals. But today, before you take upon one by one the many concerns and demands that will be pressed upon you, I ask you to step back a moment and consider some fundamental harmonizing principles which I believe should guide us in all we do.

For 20 years in public service, I have heard Oregonians talking. I have heard the voices of different ages, different races, different stations and different convictions. But the more I listen, the more the voices blend into one, a true common voice of the people of Oregon, expressing common concerns.

As I have listened in recent years, I have heard that voice rise to an anguished scream of anger, a cry of frustration at promises broken and a government becoming more remote. Almost two centuries ago, Thomas Jefferson cautioned us that the only safe depository of the ultimate powers of society is in the people themselves. But today our people felt that power, the power to govern themselves, not only slipping from their hands but in some bases being deliberately snatched from them.

Oregonians, like their fellow Americans, see a government becoming increasingly preoccupied with the form of government, rather than its substance.

Where they have asked for justice, for opportunity, for security and for health, they have given departments, commissions and bureaus bearing those names. Too often their cries have been smothered under a crust of elitists in government who cogitate, regulate and promulgate form behind soundproof walls. Where once our people asked government to stand by their side, today they ask government simply to stand aside.

THE cardinal sin of government in our times has been an arrogant assumption that all wisdom resides in it, and the conceit that government can dictate this people's wants. It has been well said that government is the art of the possible, and I say to you that it is possible for government to act effectively only where it acts in harmony with its people. Where it acts in discord, government invites rebellious backlash, and perhaps worse, the terrible silent rebellion of apathy.

The plain fact is that given the light to see the truth, our people will decide their destinies better than any elite, elected or not.

Therefore, in the business of government, we should always ask first: What do our people want? What are their goals, their priorities? Then, we should ask if the devices we set in motion truly serve the desires of the people. An employment division should help people find jobs, a department of education should educate, and a commission on aging should help make again time of tranquility, not a time of fear and uncertainty.

Those are fundamental goals for our people, and we must honor them over the efforts of some to make public agencies serve the goals of only a few. Where our people ask for protection, let us protect them. Where they ask for assistance, let us assist them and where they ask simply to be left alone, let us leave them alone.

As I urge you to listen to our people, I promise to lead by example. I have and will continue to listen, and not just to those people who have the means and the urgency to press their case in Salem. I will go to our people to listen. I will go to every county in this state. I will be in your own communities, not talking to you, but meeting with you. I will establish listening posts in every area of the state, from the towns of Eastern Oregon to the districts of our cities, where people can gather together as often as they need to express their concerns to people who will talk directly to me. I will listen to you, the elected representatives of our people, and to the many dedicated workers in our government who truly want to serve people, I will listen to all.

Let no one think, however, that when you and I promise to listen, that we abdicate our responsibility. No one wants the hard choices of government to be made solely on the basis of the latest opinion poll, or on the basis of which group can put the loudest crowd on the Capitol steps. We will listen to our people --- all our people --- to hear their true goals, the common objectives that survive the passions of the moment. But the responsibility rests with us to find the best ways to achieve those goals. It is for us to sort through the make of arguments and evidence to decide how best to honor the call for justice, security and opportunity.

Simply put, our message to Oregonians is this: Set us the task and we will choose the tools.

If there is one task above all that our people have set for us it is this: WE must arrest the vicious cycle of increased government spending and increased taxation.

As the burden of taxation rises, individual freedom of choice declines. Choices in housing, education and even health care are restricted more and more as the tax collector leaves less and less. That must not continue.

Let us be clear on one point: Oregonians are not calling for tax relief because they are selfish. To the contrary, ours is a generous people. Oregonians have supported ballot measures which committed their funds and their credit to care for the elderly, to house veterans, to improve education and to fight pollution.

The call for tax relief is not a mandate to close our ears, it is a mandate to open our eyes to spending which is wasteful, spending which is unnecessary and, most of all, spending which ignores the goals and priorities of our people.

Again we must look to the people to chart our course. They want their dollars spent wisely, they want their dollars to reach the target. Where we appropriate money for child care, they want maximum value in terms of care for children, not office furniture for officials. That is their message, and I pledge myself to do my best to see that their dollars reach the target.

One way to insure that a government spends wisely is to compel it to spend less. In terms of real dollars, that is what I propose to do. I have submitted to this legislature a two-year budget which keeps faith with the president's guidelines. Because of steadily rising costs, this will mean cuts, and we will make them. However, I firmly believe that we can streamline the operations of government without reducing its real services to its people. That will be our goal. That will be the acid test of our credibility.

In this, I ask for your support.

Having now spoken of some of the things I believe our people expect of government, I would like to share with my fellow Oregonians some expectations I have for them.

The increasing role of government in our lives has been a temptation to abandon our sense of community. Instead of caring for one another, we hire government to do the job. Aging parents who gave us love must turn in their need to social workers. Children who need firm hands on their shoulders are committed to the custody of the courts.

Our tax dollars have too often been used to buy escape from personal responsibility, and we are the poorer for it. When we trade the joy of helping other for the anonymous excise of paying tax dollars to buy social services, we --- all of us --- are the losers. My friends, government can do many things, but cannot hire love.

I ask the people of Oregon --- I challenge you --- to back your demands for less government and less taxes with a commitment to do for each other --- in person --- much of what we have been asking government to do for us. We have heard too much about "doing you won thing" and "looking out for number one." If there ever was a "Me-First Decade," let it end in Oregon.

I ask you to reach out to one another --- to give of you time, your talents and your energies. Instead of hiring more policemen, let us work with young people, in church, in youth groups, in athletics, in schools and with the families to give them feelings of self-esteem, achievement and warmth. Those youngsters will never menace us in our streets. Instead of buying places of confinement for our elderly and our mentally handicapped, let us give them the help they need to live among us.

David Ben-Gurion once said, "The true right to a country springs not from political or government authority, but from work." I believe that. I believe in working, in working together. Thousands of you fellow citizens are already on the job. If you want to help, churches, synagogues and neighborhood associations can point the way. Your community may have a volunteer bureau. You can even look in the yellow pages under "social service organizations."

I ask you to do this not only for others, but for yourselves. I remember a few years ago one of the fulfilling days of my life. I was working as a volunteer for the Boy Scouts. My assignment was to dig a drainage ditch, in the pouring rain. I would not have done that for pay, but you could not buy back from me the feeling of satisfaction I got from that job.

Again, we will try to lead by example. This government will soon announce a policy which will encourage and assist state employees to participate in the volunteer efforts of their communities. We in the Governor's office will make special efforts to provide recognition for individual and group volunteer achievements.

I will also ask every employer in this state, large and small, to follow that lead; to recognize and facilitate community service. If all the people of Oregon can take to their hearts the age-old concept of volunteerism, we can reduce the need for government intervention and tax support, we can improve the quality of life in Oregon, and we will grow as a community.

From the bottom of my heart, I commend this to all of you.

And now, some thought about this great State of ours.

The Oregon story is not new; it is not the creation of our generation. There are around us in the halls of this Capitol the names of 158 people who helped build this state. Samuel Barlow and Joel Palmer challenged the elements to build the legendary road across Mt. Hood. Abigail Scott Duniway challenged the deep-seated prejudices of her time to fight for women's rights over a century ago. Some of the 158 were founders of cities, government and businesses. Some blazed trails. Some just survived. But they all did something.

Their legacy is a people, who are hard-working and hard-headed, compassionate but demanding, self-respecting and self-reliant, and dedicated to the common good and the common sense.

Oregonians are a special people in the special place. Some of our people begin and end the day in towers of glass and steel. Others ride on horseback amid the same vistas that enchanted the American Indian and our early pioneers.

Oregonians are as varied in their ideas as in their backgrounds, going out separate ways in politics, religion and lifestyles. We cherish the freedom to go our separate ways. Let it always be that way. But, let us go our separate ways together, together in our faith in ourselves, our faith in each other, our faith in the destiny of our great state, and our faith in the One who gave us this land of beauty, opportunity and promise.

At this beginning --- this Constitutional second Monday of each odd numbered year --- we must seize the exciting opportunity given to us. Let it begin with a promise and a challenge. A personal promise of my own to you to set a high standard of performance for myself as Governor in all that I do and a challenge to you and to all Oregonians to match or, better yet, exceed that standard.

Embrace this moment. Remember it. A time like this may never come our way again.