

Governor Tom McCall

Biographical Note

Thomas Lawson McCall, Governor of Oregon from 1967-1975, was Oregon's thirtieth governor. McCall was born in Egypt, Massachusetts on March 22, 1913. He was the son of Henry McCall and Dorothy Lawson McCall.

Noteworthy accomplishments of his administration included cleaning up the Willamette River; tougher land-use laws; a bill which ended the threat of private development on Oregon's beaches; the nation's first mandatory bottle-deposit law; and creative energy conservation measures, such as a ban on outdoor business lighting during the energy crisis of the 1970's.

McCall's parents moved to Portland from Massachusetts in 1909. Shortly thereafter they moved to a ranch near Prineville on the Crooked River. McCall spent significant time during his childhood both on the ranch and in Massachusetts. McCall attended the University of Oregon, where he graduated with a degree in journalism in 1936. His first job was at the News-Review in Moscow, Idaho, from 1937-1942. In 1939 he married Audrey Owen. They moved back to Oregon and he began working for The Oregonian newspaper, and then as a news announcer at KGW radio. In 1944 their son, Thomas W. L. McCall, Jr. (known as "Tad") was born. McCall enlisted in the Navy that same year, and served as a war correspondent in the Pacific.



In January of 1946 he returned to Oregon and began a nightly radio talk show on KEX in Portland. He joined the Young Republicans, and in 1949 he was offered a job as Governor Douglas McKay's assistant. That same year his second son, Samuel W. McCall III was born.

In 1964 McCall ran for Secretary of State as a stepping-stone to the governorship. He defeated Alfred Corbett, a victory which ran counter to the trend of Republican defeats in the 1964 elections.

In 1966 he decided to run for governor, and found he was opposed by his own party. Nevertheless, he ran on the issue of "livability" and defeated Robert Straub in the general election in November 1966. His first major political victory came with legislation known as the

"Beach Bill," which granted the state government the power to zone Oregon's beaches, thus protecting them from private development.

McCall was known for being more publicly accessible than many of his predecessors as governor. He held open houses and enjoyed making public appearances. His independence resulted in poor relations with his own party. However, his accessibility endeared him to the media, which supported him in glowing terms.

In 1969, his belief in the control of development led to a proposal for land-use planning. McCall wanted to broaden Oregon's industrial base, but at the same time insisted on conserving the environment. His proposed legislation (Senate Bill 10) required local governments to complete comprehensive zoning plans within two years.

Perhaps the most famous environmental legislation enacted under McCall was House Bill 1036, the "Bottle Bill," which was the nation's first mandatory bottle-deposit law and was designed to decrease litter in Oregon. The bill was enacted in 1971.

Also in 1970 McCall approved the "Vortex I" rock concert at McIver State Park as a way to divert potential anti-war protestors from rioting during the national American Legion convention in Portland. It was a unique state-supervised event that drew 35,000 participants over several days. Although the danger of rioting was probably minimal, the move nevertheless helped to cement McCall's re-election victory over Robert Straub.

Despite his notoriety as an environmentalist, McCall did side with economic concerns on certain issues, such as timber harvesting (he opposed restrictions on private industry) and nuclear power (he supported the Trojan nuclear facility). With regard to labor concerns, McCall vetoed legislation designed to organize migrant farm workers.

In 1973 land-use planning again became a major issue, and Senate Bill 100 from that session was designed to provide state control over land-use decisions. Although the final bill did not go as far as McCall originally intended, a compromise bill forged by L.B. Day, McCall's head of the Dept. of Environmental Quality, created the Land Conservation and Development Commission.

In 1973 McCall developed a plan for tax reform which included an increase in the income tax and a freeze on property taxes, with the goal to shift funding for schools away from property taxes and toward the income of the wealthy. He encountered fierce opposition to the plan, and relied on his personal popularity to carry it to victory at the polls. However, the proposal failed with the voters.

In terms of national issues, McCall was a vocal and steady supporter of the war effort in Vietnam. He was one of the first prominent Republicans to publicly call for President Nixon's resignation due to the Watergate scandal. In late May of 1973, McCall called for voluntary measures to help alleviate concerns over the energy crisis. He also ordered extensive conservation measures to be followed by state agencies, and ordered businesses to shut off outdoor lighting to conserve energy. He also supported an innovative gas rationing plan that used

vehicles' license-plate numbers ("odd" or "even") to determine when a person could purchase gasoline. The latter idea gained national attention.

McCall left office on January 14, 1975. Despite his famous 1971 quote imploring people not to move to the state, Oregon's population grew 25% during his eight years in office. He took a job as KATU television's news analyst, and also traveled nationwide supporting other states' efforts to enact bottle bills similar to Oregon's. He also actively opposed a 1976 effort to abolish the LCDC, and another effort to dismantle it in 1982. In February of 1978 McCall announced he would once again run for governor, however his campaign suffered from a lack of both funding and focus, and he was defeated by Victor Atiyeh in the Republican primary.

In December of 1982 he was hospitalized, and on January 8, 1983 Tom McCall lost a long battle with cancer. He was buried in Redmond Memorial Cemetery.

Source: Oregon Secretary of State, Oregon State Archives at <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/governors/McCall/mccallbiography.htm>.