

## Governor Tom McCall

### Legislative Message, 1973

**Source:** Legislative Address Governor Tom McCall, Oregon, 1973

Mr. President, Mr. Speaker, Ladies and Gentlemen of the Fifty-Seventh Legislative Assembly, Distinguished Guests, and Fellow Citizens:

Oregon is an inspiration. Whether you come to it or are born to it, you become entranced by our State's beauty, the opportunities she affords, and the independent spirit of her citizens.

Oregon is an inspiration even to those who do not come here to live. The story of the Willamette River --- our ecological Easter --- has evoked cries of hurrah! Across the Nation and in distant parts of the world. And we have heard, along with applause for Oregon, lamentation for other states where progress has felled prey to expediency.

Oregon story is an inspiration to all Americans who believe they should be able to influence their government and the law-making process. The most intensive special interest pressure ever brought to bear on this Legislature was by lobbyist who declared that the bottle bill should not pass. But it did pass, because you and you constituents were inspired by a love for the traditions and beauty of our home.

You and I shouldn't claim we love Oregon more than anyone else, but we do love this State as much as anyone. Our thoughts today and in the deliberations to come must spring from our determination to keep Oregon lovable, and make it more livable.

This is the last occasion I will stand in this chamber before a newly-elected Assembly asking enactment of a comprehensive package of laws. God willing, I expect to address you again, but not with such a wide array of ideas.

You have listened to me in the past with more than pro forma politeness, and I deeply appreciate the attention you give me today.

This is the 12th Legislative Assembly of which I have been a part --- and it seems to me as if we are always talking of troubled times, critical times, crucial times. But I can use no other words to describe this point in history.

Over the years, the Legislature and I, and our fellow citizens, have brought about imaginative change that will be warmly received by posterity. But modern society permits us no time to savor

our successes. Society is not static, and government must be able to respond promptly, capably and fairly to emergent crises. The people of Oregon have high expectations. They look to us for fulfillment.

The Legislature and this Administration --- with the expectations of the people as our beacon --- have done as much to affect the destiny of Oregon as any citizens, including those whose names are emblemized on the walls of these chambers. We have established the pattern --- and that pattern commands us to make one more great upward bound to protect the fabric of life throughout this Century.

IN my first inaugural address I said: "An Imperative of progress in these years is a rapport between the executive and legislative branches." I was pleased to be able to say to you four years later that effective communication had been established, and that "in Oregon we have the most meaningful rapport between the legislative and executive branches in any of the 50 states."

Today we are more convinced than ever that reasonable men and women can treat the complex ills of society --- and that no problem can frustrate and enlightened people's search for a solution.

So it is that we now tackle that misshapen creature --- our tax structure for the support of schools.

We all are conscious of the grave inequities in educational finance. Some of our citizens can provide only minimal schooling for their children, even through they shoulder a massive property tax burden. We are confronted by a truism: Taxes on homes for the support of school operating costs bear little relationship to an ability to pay. We see this brutal tax already devastating the poor and the elderly, beginning to overwhelm the middle-income taxpayer, and making home ownership and impossibility for many of our citizens.

On other occasions I have described reform of taxation for education as the greatest challenge to the 57th Legislative Assembly. I will submit to you on the day after tomorrow a special message outlining the tax reform I propose, and a new formula for distributing revenue to public schools.

This and other communications I will send to you will be directed toward obtaining a better social, economic and environmental climate --- all recognizing that enhancing the quality of life is the lodestar of this Administration.

This has reigned as my priority in every legislative message Two years ago I suggested that an awareness of the priority "is running stronger in the veins of Oregonians;" and we should assume, as a broad foundation for our actions in the months ahead, that this commitment is even more compelling in 1973.

Quality of life is the sum total of the fairness of our tax structure; the caliber of our homes; the cleanliness of our air and water; and the provision of affirmative assistance to those who cannot assist themselves. True quality is absent if we allow social suffering to abide in an otherwise pristine environment.

Our record thus far in enhancing the quality of life is exceptional. Unification of social service agencies into the Department of Human Resources has generated an increased capacity for dealing with human problems. The shakedown period has con entreated on the delivery of services to people, and we are further ahead with this than we had any rights to expect.

Key evidence of our reverence for the quality of life abound. The level of educational attainment has increased measurable. Community colleges have opened educational attainment ahs increased measurable. Community colleges have opened new doors of opportunity to thousands upon thousands of students, young and old. WE have written almost the last work for all America in protecting our beaches. WE have found ways for more of the mentally ill to remain secure in their own communities, and out of numbing institutional environments. We have given opportunity to thousands of offenders of the law to change their way of life to become productive, conscientious citizens.

We have established salmon runs where we knew of none before and assisted Nature to increase her bounty elsewhere. Last month we saw in the Elk River of Southern Oregon bright, heavy-bodied fish we sent to sea three years ago, now swamping the hatchery of their birth in the monumental achievement.

These are reflections of the determination of Oregonians to win quality in their lives. It means that after earning a living we have living that is worthwhile.

But there is a shameless threat to our environment and to the whole quality of life --- unfettered despoiling of the land. Sagebrush subdivisions, coastal “condo mania,” Oregon’s status as the environmental model for the Nation.

We are dismayed that we have not stopped miss-use of the land, our most valuable finite natural resource.

Umbrage at blatant disrespect for sound planning is not taken only at Salem. Less than a month ago the Jefferson County commissioners appealed to me for a moratorium on subdivision because the speculators had out-run local capacity for rational control.

We are in dire need of a state land-use policy, new subdivision laws, and new standards for planning and zoning by cities and counties. The interests of Oregon for today and in the future must be protected from grasping wastrels of the land. We must respect another truism: that unlimited and unregulated growth leads inexorably to a lowered quality of life.

By the end of this month I will submit messages covering these and other principal topics related briefly in the biennial budget that is already in you hands.

But you will need no special message from me to act upon the Women’s Rights Amendment to the Federal Constitution. I urge you to ratify this Amendment as your first order of business in this session --- and as a continuation of our mutual respect for human rights.

I will ask you to submit to the people a proposal for reducing the fiscal rigidity of our highway trust fund which so depresses our ability to provide an integrates transportation system.

I will ask you to authorize a \$150-million bond issue to raise funds to overcome an immense backlog of transportation needs. The details for this proposal will be presented to you in a special message that will reach you desks tomorrow.

I also will ask your support for a \$200-million revenue bond issue to provide better housing for Oregonians and to stimulate our economy.

I will ask you approval of more than tow dozen traffic safety measures --- measures that are underscored by last year's vehicular carnage.

Oregon is admired for the openness of State government and the ease of access to it. The Legislature has won trust by doing the public's business in public. Running parallel to our cause is the public's guarantor of openness and revelation, the Oregon press.

The presence our insurance of a free and just society, but forays elsewhere against the Fourth Estate cow confine us that intimidation of the insurer has arrived under a-new guise. We must react with a law to child the press from over-zealousness. The newsman-source privacy that we have taken as a matter of traditional right in Oregon now must be made a matter of legal right as well.

Without a fair and meticulous press we would deliberate in a vacuum, hearing little and doing unheard.

During this session I also will ask you to further reorganize State government, making provision for Departments of Land and Water Resources, and Fish and Wildlife. Reorganization is politically pallid and may be politically hazardous at times, but we cannot look forward to the 21st Century with a governmental structure that already is antiquated in the 20th.

And do we concede that constitutional revision is dead? Three times I have asked the Legislature for it; and although you were responsive, the voters were not.

Even today, I confess, I cannot walk away from it. Thus, I recommend to you now that you explore a more palatable way of re-doing Oregon's patchwork charter --- explore that risks of calling a state constitutional convention.

Facing the 56th Legislative Assembly two years ago, I suggested that the session pass "a lowering-of-the-age-of-majority bill." I repeat that proposal today, noting it now possesses the urgency of an idea whose time has really come.

Tow years ago I also called for expansion of state bonding authority to finance irrigation developments. The Legislature authorized submission of appropriate legislation to the ballot, but the people balked at the polls last May. It is a potent concept, though --- one well worth trying again, especially in view of the unlimited future of Oregon's foreign trade.

Even as we move toward heightened governmental efficiency on behalf of the people, we recognize that the concept of the people helping people has even more validity. We cherish what we now see as the re-dawning of the age of volunteerism.

Thomas Jefferson advised us: "That government is the strongest of which every man feels himself a part." When the activities of government are worthy, and when the results are visible, citizens take pride in their contribution to government.

More than 2,000 volunteers have dedicated part of their lives to programs of the Department of Human Resources alone, giving of themselves to those in desperate need.

The people are making themselves a part of government at a time when they are urgently needed, at time when we are passing aging to self-determination by the states.

Federal revenue sharing is the beginning. It is true that we have grumbled in the past that the dollars for revenue sharing are being taken out of the hide of the environmental and people programs, but at the same time we must commend the President for trying to crowd deficit spending into a manageable corner.

We have and will protest a dilution of effort by the Federal government, but perhaps to no avail. The President is caught between a demanding public and a Congress that shirks responsibility, at the same time that he seeks to gain acceptance of his own philosophical persuasions.

Somehow, Oregon and most other states are lost in the national slue-footing. A balance will be found in the future, and New Federalism --- in the form of almost unrestricted revenue sharing grants --- helps to make this possible.

Make no mistake about it --- revenue sharing is fundamental to progress. How long it last and in what quantities will be determined by how imaginatively and wisely the money is used.

There is a danger that the money will go to perpetuate ineffective government, and the danger will remain unless we commit ourselves to the more hopeful concept that it can and should be a catalyst toward improving the quality of life.

That quality just be measured primarily in human terms. Revenue sharing dollars must not disappear solely into the maw of never-ending capital requirements --- those material things I refer to as lampposts.

This Administration has sought to coax local governments into innovative responses to Federal revenue sharing. We urge you to consider our plan to pass a hotel-motel tax, with the proceeds going to the cities and counties if, in turn, they will match new state social services grants.

These grants, if accepted, could do much to resolve the day care and child development crisis. Yet the amount of money involved pales by comparison with what we propose for educational support and property tax relief.

WE determined late in 1972 that, at last, we will head into a biennium where we will not face instant fiscal chaos. Without increasing taxes we will have resources to overcome some pressing problems of the past without borrowing trouble for the future.

Despite this brightened outlook we resisted the bureaucratic urge to dramatically expand existing programs or find new ones to finance. Instead we ask you approval of our proposal to commit \$130-million from anticipated and on-hand revenue to the public schools, and to make these dollars a direct offset to taxes on homeowners and renters.

Let no one assume that the treasury is bulging. Never does enough money lie at our fingertips to finance what the public justly demands. Demands change, or grow, after we have prepared the budget. With the present constitutional strictures against annual legislative sessions, we are left in the almost impossible position of forecasting both the State's fiscal position and the wishes of the people 30 months hence.

Consequently, I am in general agreement with a proposal that I call a special session of the Legislature next January to deal with fiscal matters. My staff had urged last summer that I declare this is my policy.

But I could neither then nor now promise to call the Legislature to Salem next January. Circumstances may well dictate a special legislative session before that time, or after it.

I am committed to support of a constitutional amendment permitting annual session of the Legislature, but I cannot make a pledge to begin that tradition though governmental action until we have fulfilled our promise to achieve tax reform. This well could require one or more special sessions, the timing of which would be dictated by your own actions and the decisions of the people.

Tax reform is only one of the improvements we must make in the laws. We have often discussed with each other in the past how we might elevate the position of the State and the conditions under which we all live. Many of the ideas we have had are not new except perhaps in degree. We would well serve ourselves and the people if we accord the past a place in the future.

It isn't that the executive and legislative are bereft of the ability to think new and innovate. But if a cause is exemplary, we should keep coming back to it; you can be assured that it will keep coming back to us.

Last year I was presented with a copy of the second of three inaugural addresses given by Samuel McCall --- my grandfather --- to the Massachusetts Legislative Assembly.

In his 1917 address Governor Samuel McCall of Massachusetts requested governmental reorganization and money to finance a constitutional revision commission --- requests striking similar to those made today, in 1973, by another Governor McCall.

Samuel McCall also urged compulsory health insurance, improvements in the workmen's compensation system, cost of living controls, renewed attention to traffic safety, and prohibition of billboards along scenic highways.

He suggested a greenway concept for a new road, endorsed the abolition of capital punishment, urged firm measures to curb drug abuse and sought new protections for consumers.

He called attention to the coming Tri centennial of the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock --- a newer counterpart to our coming Bicentennial observance of the birth of the United States.

Governor Samuel McCall's ideas are on target even now; and a paragraph of inspiration in his address also is as applicable today as it was then, and as applicable to Oregon as to Massachusetts. He said"

"If regard is and to the traditions of the Commonwealth and the character of her people, there is no place upon the globe that has title to be governed by wiser laws. I she to have the sort of government to which she is entitled? It rests with us to give answer. Let us reverence the mandate we have received from the people. Let it be our aim to do deeds which shall take their place with the best things in our history and be an incentive and a challenge to those who shall come after us. The power which we wield does not belong to us but to those who put it in our hands. And unless we shall use it solely for the public weal, we shall fall far short of performing our duty."

In Oregon, our accomplishments of the next days and months will stem --- as before --- from the labors of people who gave the best of themselves, of public servants who put the common good ahead of personal or party interest.

WE will not accomplish all that we as individuals believe we should, ever though we do our utmost personally to fulfill public expectations. There must be conciliation, flexibility and compromise if plans are to become reality.

Fifty-six years ago Governor Samuel McCall spoke of a state rich in accomplishment. He spoke of an intelligent and prosperous people, a state towering in history renowned in the world and precious to us all.

In his charge to the Legislative Assembly, Governor Samuel McCall expressed love for Oregon:

"For us to tarnish the luster of a fame so splendid would be shameful; not to diminish it would be a very great thing, but to augment it would be induced glory."

Tom McCall

Source: OR State Archives at <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/governors/McCall/legis1973.html>.