

Excerpts from remarks recognizing the Hanford accomplishments of
Senator Mark Hatfield
Oregon Hanford Waste Board meeting
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Portland, OR

Mary Lou Blazek, Administrator of the Oregon Office of Energy's Nuclear Safety Division

I am delighted that we, along with the Oregon Hanford Waste Board, are host today to this very special occasion -- to honor Senator Mark Hatfield for his many accomplishments in helping protect Oregonians and the environment from the hazards at the Hanford Nuclear Site.

Since Senator Hatfield announced his intention not to seek another term as Oregon's senior Senator, there have been many accounts of his illustrious career and his many achievements for Oregon and for our nation. We do not want his work on Hanford issues to be overlooked and we're pleased to have this opportunity to personally thank him.

Governor Kitzhaber was not able to be here this afternoon. Roy Hemmingway is the Governor's Advisor for Salmon and Energy.

Roy Hemmingway, Representing Governor John Kitzhaber

Thank you Mary Lou.

Governor Kitzhaber regrets not being able to be here today. He is unable to break away from business in Salem, now that the Legislature is in session. Of course, the Governor recognizes that if he attended the celebration for every one of Senator Hatfield's contributions to this state, the Governor would have little time to devote to state business.

Since the early 1980s, Hanford has been a permanent fixture on Oregon's list of top issues. During these past 15 years, we've seen tremendous change for the better at Hanford. We've also seen Oregon move from being a state with no say over Hanford issues to one with considerable influence. Many of these achievements would simply not have occurred without the work of Senator Mark Hatfield.

To truly appreciate our progress, and the impact of Senator Hatfield, I believe it would be useful to look back at some of the early battles that Oregon waged on Hanford issues.

First, in 1982, Congress passed the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. That Act established the process and schedule for developing a permanent repository for high-level radioactive waste. Hanford soon became one of only three sites selected for detailed study to determine if they would be able to safely store some of the nation's most dangerous wastes for thousands of years.

The Nuclear Waste Policy act provided no opportunity for adjacent states to participate in the site studies and no funding for them to carry out their own studies. Oregon requested federal funding to assess the potential impacts on the Columbia River or on Oregon if Hanford was chosen as the disposal site, but the request was repeatedly denied.

Eventually, Oregon joined with Washington to conduct a joint review of the Hanford repository issue. That review convinced Oregon that Hanford was not a suitable site. Senator Hatfield concurred, and made a crucial vote in committee that helped kill further consideration of Hanford for the high-level waste repository.

That was the State's first real introduction to Hanford. And, we discovered that without powerful and supportive friends in Washington D.C., we faced tremendous obstacles in getting anyone to consider Oregon's interests when decisions about Hanford were made.

As we learned more and more about Hanford – the horrendous waste management practices of the early years, the releases of radioactive materials to the environment during that time, and the dangers posed by millions of gallons of highly radioactive waste being stored in deteriorating tanks – we understood how significant the risks were to Oregon from Hanford. And we realized that to reduce these risks, Oregon needed access to information, access to those making the decisions, and funds to pay for the work we needed to do to protect ourselves. None of these things came easy, and none would have come at all without the work by Senator Hatfield.

Senator Hatfield was directly responsible for the most significant change at Hanford to occur in 40 years – the end of weapons material production and the shift to environmental cleanup.

In 1986, the accident at Chernobyl focused considerable attention on the safety of Hanford's N Reactor, the nation's principal supplier of weapons plutonium. An analysis by the state of Oregon recommended extensive safety improvements at the plant. Governor Goldschmidt called for the immediate and permanent shutdown of N Reactor.

The Defense and Energy Departments agreed to shut the reactor down – but only until expensive modifications before restart. These modifications addressed only some of Oregon's safety concerns.

Senator Hatfield stepped in. The Senator, as he often did, conducted public hearings in the Northwest to gather facts about the issue. Convinced of the hazards posed by N Reactor, Senator Hatfield was successful in eliminating funding for the reactor and it never resumed operation. Later, he cut funding for the PUREX facility, putting an end to the production of plutonium at Hanford, and shifting the focus from weapons production to environmental cleanup.

Since that time, Senator Hatfield has continually fought for sufficient cleanup funds. He has challenged any proposals to shift the focus from cleanup to any other mission. He has worked to ensure that Hanford complies with federal and state environmental laws. For Senator Hatfield, the bottom line is protecting people and the environment.

This was a job with no glory. There was no addition to Portland's skyline to which we could affix a plaque to honor the man responsible. Typical of the work of the man who represented Oregon in the Senate for 30 years, this was simply a case of stepping forward to do what's right for future generations of Oregonians.

On behalf of Governor Kitzhaber, and of all Oregonians, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to Senator Hatfield for his longstanding support and leadership on Hanford issues.

Mary Lou Blazek

The Oregon Office of Energy has been actively involved in Hanford issues for over 15 years and has ably supported this Board since its creation. John Savage is Administrator of the Office of Energy and will present a plaque of appreciation to Senator Hatfield.

John Savage, Administrator, Oregon Office of Energy

Thank you Mary Lou. It is a privilege to be here to honor Senator Hatfield.

One of the fundamental missions of this agency is to protect Oregonians and the environment from Hanford. Any achievements we can claim over the past 15 years must be shared in a significant manner with Senator Hatfield.

On behalf of the Governor, the Office of Energy, the Waste Board, and the citizens of Oregon, I would like to express our gratitude to you for your leadership, for your support and for your perseverance in protecting Oregon. Thank you.

Senator Mark Hatfield

Thank you John, very much. Mary Lou. Roy, thank you for your kind remarks and representing Governor Kitzhaber.

As I was sitting here today, with my heart full of joy and happiness to be back with some of the people with whom I have had the privilege of working with, I couldn't help but think back on the occasion that I have shared with many of you before of being at Hiroshima a month after the bomb was dropped.

And I have to admit that I came away from that experience totally different than anything that ever affected my life.

I brought with me, I suppose out of that experience, a certain bias, a certain prejudice, but I think it was an insight I only wish I could have shared in one sense with all of you.

Because when you see the results of a puny bomb in comparison to our capacity today in nuclear weapons, I don't think it's a question of being anti-nuclear, it's a question of trying to eliminate nuclear bombs.

But I also was thinking that every time my name was mentioned today it should have been we. We. No one in public life achieves anything by themselves. And I would have to say beginning with the extraordinary representatives in this room today, of extraordinary staff through 46 years of public life.

I truly have been blessed with dedicated, extraordinary, talented, young people, and senior citizens as well who have been interns along with young people on my staff. So I want to pay that tribute to them.

I want to also say that we includes of course, the key leadership of our state, the political leadership, a Governor Kitzhaber, a John Savage. Roy, you are part of that leadership as well. I sort of think of you here as John Kitzhaber.

All of you are representing the political leadership of our state. You are part of that we.

Those of you who represent the citizen's groups and each of you in your own capacity, serving on the Board, serving as voices raised in an environment sometimes which is less prone to recognize that the number one environmental issue of this region of the country is Hanford.

It does not mean we neglect our responsibilities environmentally for healthy forests, for clean air, clean water. Many environmental organizations get so focused on one part of the environment, they lose sight that overriding all these other interests is Hanford. And it will be until it is totally removed from our landscape.

I want to merely comment on current matters in a very brief way. I have resisted ever trying to second guess my successors, whether it be at the state level or the federal level, but it seems to me we must all collectively – again the we – maintain the leverage and the pressure upon those in decision-making roles, to forget about trying to start-up plants at Hanford, whether it be the Isaiah Project or the FFTF. That the basic single mission should be in the Department of Energy, in my view, is to clean up the mess that was created.

But we also, as a fiscal conservative that I am, we must recognize that we have to have far more accountability of the millions and millions and millions of dollars we have spent thus far and have so little to show for it. I believe that that is not using the taxpayers' money to a high degree of accountability. I'm not suggesting corruption. I'm just suggesting waste. Let's make the focus on the nuclear waste and forget about a lot of these ridiculous schemes that have cost so much money and have produced very, very little.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I must admit that I'm very happy, very joyful about the experience of being with you, as well as this token.