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Embracing the Oregon Way

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Each day here at work in the Hatfield School, I'm buoyed by my colleagues pouring their hope into serving the people of Oregon. But even a quick evening glance at mainstream news drags me down into near-despair. Where does their hope come from when civility and compassion seem on endless holiday?

Mark Hatfield found hope, I believe, in making deliberate and continuous progress — if at times uneven — in a swiftly-shifting civic sphere. Raised in a rural Oregon community, he learned to adapt to ever-changing situations, understanding—just as farmers do—the need to continuously revise how and when to do a thing if the landscape changes. As a public servant, he was under no illusion that he would have more control over getting things done than a farmer does over the weather. In policy matters, he also observed the landscape and adjusted accordingly.

While keeping his gaze fixed on justice, he crucially also distinguished the *right thing to do* from the *right way to do it* – respecting the people's will as expressed through legal and civil discourse, process, and statute, and acknowledging the allure of power. In one case, and despite his deep personal beliefs, he (painfully) chose not to pardon a man scheduled to be executed, because he found no *legal basis* to do so. But afterwards, he worked through the ballot initiative process that ultimately outlawed capital punishment in Oregon. Then—and *only then*—did he swiftly commute the remaining death row sentences.

This important distinction between short-term expediency and long-term integrity animated almost everything he did. Whatever his view on an issue, he recognized that his view was simply that—*his* view. In pursuing outcomes aligned with his beliefs, he worked civilly, with the people of the state to incorporate other views and to nurture public agreement around outcomes that were good for Oregon and for society as a whole. That was The Oregon Way he inherited and embraced.

These three aspects of Hatfield's legacy fuel the hope we bring to our own work today: 1) he was an honorable person cautious with and wary of power (even when he had it); 2) he worked within the constraints of civil society and the law to seek justice over the long term; and 3) he deftly balanced the needs of the individual and those of the collective.

Here, in our corner of the Hatfield School, in the National Policy Consensus Center, we strive to continue that legacy in our own small way. We help individuals and communities advance justice for themselves, their neighbors, and their communities by working with them to navigate civil society, make their voices heard on public issues, and address community challenges and opportunities collaboratively. And we teach the next generations of civil servants to carry that legacy forward. While none of us would say we quite measure up to Senator Hatfield, I think we would say that, in our work together with the people of the state, we aspire to enhance and strengthen The Oregon Way for our time.

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Tony Salvador is executive director of the National Policy Consensus Center in the Hatfield School of Government. He is an ethnographer and organizational strategist. Tony has had a long career in these roles at Intel and as a consultant, leading efforts on the ground to identify and implement collaborative solutions for communities and governments locally and worldwide. Tony has a PhD from Tufts University and a BA from Franklin and Marshall College.