

Legislative Update -- Ethics Reform



Rep. Parrish: Re-Establish Public Trust in Government

Long before the revelations of alleged misdeeds by former Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber, Representative Julie Parrish was working toward a more open, transparent government. Although the actions of Kitzhaber and his fiancée Cylvia Hayes have perhaps added a new urgency to the push for ethics reform, the need was obvious enough for Parrish to have offered bills on the subject in each of her Sessions in the Legislature.

For the 2015 Session, Parrish has offered "The Ethics and Campaign Reform" agenda, which would increase accountability and transparency in Oregon government, and would also close some loopholes that can be found in older statutes which have failed to keep up with modern practices.

In addition to increasing public focus on the government corruption operating just out of view over the years, the Kitzhaber resignation may have opened another door for Parrish's ethics agenda. New Governor Kate Brown has worked with Parrish before on transparency issues and the two women enjoy a good working relationship.

Parrish's Agenda includes nine Bills already filed, with another five still in the drafting stage at press time. Among these Bills are:

HB 2789 would require that the entirety of a candidate's statement in the Voters Pamphlet be accurate, or subject the candidate to the same fine currently levied if he or she does not tell the truth about "required information" such as educational attainment. A candidate, for instance, who states "I am opposed to tax increases" but voted in favor of a tax increase while a public official could run afoul of this new requirement.

HB 2790 would require that all testimony given by elected officials or on behalf of public agencies be given under oath, and therefore subject to Oregon's perjury laws. This would have been very helpful during the Cover Oregon debacle, when the Legislature was given false information about the program by Governor Kitzhaber's staff. A companion bill – HB 2791 – would subject unsworn false statements given to the Legislature in public testimony to perjury statutes.

HB 2787 would establish a Task Force to reform Oregon's voter rolls with particular emphasis on so-called "Inactive" voters. The State currently has over 411,000 Inactive voters who do not receive a ballot because they may have failed to vote in the last Federal election, or failed to respond to the County Clerk on a signature verification question. Oregon's vote-by-mail system is largely responsible for the size of this disenfranchised group – states with traditional in-person voting do not have large number of these voters.

Parrish is working to build additional bi-partisan support for her "Ethics and Campaign Reform" Agenda. A copy of the Agenda document, describing all the ideas included, is available from her office.

Rep. Barreto: What drives Oregon business away



"We need to keep businesses in Oregon," says Oregon Legislator Greg Barreto. In fact, the major reason he ran for office was his frustration with Measures 66 and 67, which proposed tax increases on business. Both passed. Barreto says that Oregon has 40 different taxes trying to get passed this year. "We need to keep in mind that business owners & entrepreneurs donate and create jobs. Oregon is chasing these people out," Barreto says. He cited as an example a donation of \$9 million to the Salem-Kaiser School District to get a tech career curriculum going and fund a building and equipment.

Greg Barreto is especially interested in HB 3405, the Oregon minimum tax law. "Right

now," he says, "if a business makes no money in a bad year, the state will tax on the gross sales." He advocates striking that part from the bill. This year, according to the Tax Foundation, 31 states have a lower corporate income tax rate than Oregon, whose rate is 7.6%. Iowa has the highest rate at 12%; Texas and five other states charge no corporate income tax at all.

It's hard for Oregon to compete with states that have no corporate income tax, especially when we are raising ours. HB 3405 and HB 2649 increased taxes in the state's corporate minimum tax by \$733 million, raised taxes on households and corporations making more than \$250K a year, and raised income taxes on businesses.

Even so, the 2014 Forbes' Best States for Business List ranked Oregon #18 overall, with a Business Cost Rank of #12. The Tax Foundation's 2014 State Business Tax Climate Index ranked Oregon #12. In terms of per capita real GDP growth from 2007 to 2013, Oregon is #2 in the nation, second only to North Dakota, according to the Oregon Office of Economic Analysis.



Rep. Piluso: House bill establishes a Women Veterans Coordinator

Rep. Carla Piluso (D-Gresham) has introduced a bill to establish a Women Veterans Coordinator at the Oregon Department of Veterans' Affairs. The coordinator would help female vets and their families access their benefits. Out of the 331,632 veterans living in Oregon, 28,483 are women. Vets are entitled to a variety of medical, educational, housing, and other support services, but many female vets are not taking advantage of these. In 1994, Congress established the Center for Women Veterans, and today almost all states have State Women Veterans Coordinators, according to the US Department of Veterans Affairs.