



Legislative E-Newsletter

Rep. Phil Barnhart

73rd Legislative Session – Jan. 14, 2005



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Welcome

This is the first of many weekly e-newsletters that I will be sending out during the 2005 session of the Oregon State Legislature. The purpose of this newsletter is to keep you informed about the progress that the Legislature is

making, and about the work that I am doing to represent House District 11 and to support the values that we all hold dear: educating and nurturing our children, supporting our seniors, and protecting our communities. Each newsletter will contain one or more articles about the important events of the previous week.

**Rep. Barnhart's Response to the New Partisan
Rules of the Oregon State House**

If the first day of the legislative session will be any indication, this legislature is beginning a bumpy ride. With the House still in Republican control, as it has been since 1991, and a Democratic majority in the Senate for the first time since 1993, bipartisan cooperation has become more important than ever.

All politicians make campaign promises; some to improve education, others to cut taxes, and everyone promises bipartisanship. Unfortunately, the first promise broken in the 2005 State House of Representatives was the Republican majority's promise of bipartisanship.

The Chief Clerk of the House is a vital non-partisan officer who enforces the rules of the House and advises legislators regarding those rules. The Clerk has therefore been chosen by the entire House since 1843, encouraging the Clerk to maintain her non-partisan independent role as keeper of the records and parliamentarian.

However, the Republican majority recently discarded the traditional rules of the State House by giving the Speaker of the House, Karen Minnis, the ability to determine the Clerk's salary and to fire her at will. They then restricted the use of "minority reports," which are the only method for the minority party to express their disapproval of a bill as it comes out of a committee. The Republican majority has given the Speaker authoritarian control over the Oregon State House of Representatives.

This move has guaranteed the partisanship of this Legislature, discouraging cooperation and diminishing our productivity. Legislators can no longer rely on the fair and unbiased enforcement of the rules of the House, because the chief enforcer of those rules now serves at the pleasure of the leader of the majority party. Imagine playing a football game where the coach of one team has the ability to choose the referees and to fire them if he doesn't like their performance. The other team would not need to show up for the game.

Fortunately, the present Chief Clerk, Ramona Kenady, is a woman whose life has been dedicated to preserving the traditions and decorum of the legislature. I have no doubt that she will never compromise the position of the office for self-preservation, but I worry about the future.

This move by the Republican majority was a power grab. There is no other honest way to interpret it. It has compromised the accountability of the legislature and degraded our democracy's credibility. We have not lost our faith in the current Chief Clerk, but the integrity of the office is tarnished. I will continue to work for bipartisan cooperation, but this action will make that much more difficult.

Sincerely yours,



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