



State Representative **Mitch Greenlick**

The MitchMessage

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This is the stage in the legislative session when the basic work on many significant bills gets quietly done. Reflecting on the last two weeks stimulated my thinking on why we are able to do our work --- generally quietly and efficiently. And certainly quite differently than what is happening in our nation's Capitol. Which obviously brings me to the question of partisanship in Salem. I spent my first two terms in the minority. Since then the Democrats have controlled the House for four terms and we had a 30-30 split during one term. As I think back I can say we were able to do our job effectively in each of those terms, including the term we had shared leadership and needed votes from both parties to pass any legislation.

Events during the last two weeks provide a particularly striking look at how we manage to work together and still leave room for juicy political drama. As I reviewed the bills that passed the House since my last MitchMessage three important bills stand out, and those three bills provide a striking look at the extent to which partisan politics does or does not influence our work. These three bills are HB 2546, SB 324, and HB 2395. Each of these three bills was significant, complex, and potentially politically explosive.

HB 2546 is a bill to regulate the sale and use of electronic cigarettes, the so-called "vape" bill. It defines "inhalant delivery systems", prohibits their sale to anybody younger than 18 years of age, and subjects the use of these products to the Oregon Clean Air Act. The bill was developed by a large bipartisan group of legislators. As the bill came through my House Health Care Committee (on a 7-1 bipartisan vote) there were several suggestions on how to amend the bill. But only one, proposed by a Republican member, was accepted. The bill, as it moved to the floor, was opposed by the tobacco industry and by the "vape shops", the businesses that sell electronic cigarettes. After a modest amount of floor discussion it passed 56-2.

Another critical bill that passed with a minimum of drama was HB 2395, the bill to extend the Oregon Hospital Tax for another four years. This bill continues a process that has helped fund the Oregon Health Plan for more than a decade. The care of the 650,000 Oregonians who were on OHP before the recent expansion of Medicaid is financed by a combination of state and federal funds. For each \$1 the state contributes the federal government contributes about \$1.70. But beginning in 2003 there were not enough state funds to support the system. During that session, my first, we devised a plan by which the hospitals would be taxed based on their gross revenue and that money

would be used to match the federal contribution needed to fund OHP. Then the hospital would be given back their contribution in the form of increased payments for services to the OHP members. The precise details of that deal have been renegotiated every two years since then.

This year the basic outline of the bill was worked out in negotiations between Governor Kitzhaber's staff and the Oregon Health Leadership Council. A bipartisan, bicameral legislative committee was named to craft the final bill. I served as the House chair of that committee and we produced the final version of the bill, which I carried on the House floor last week. After a brief floor discussion it passed the House on a 56-2 vote.

Not all bills have the same trajectory, however, and we had one, SB 324, that provided political drama sufficient to last for the whole month. SB 324 was the clean fuels bill that was a priority of Governor Kitzhaber and was linked to the activities of Cylvia Hayes, his first lady. The bill simply eliminated the five-year sunset date on a program passed during the 2009 legislative session. And, as you can imagine, it was extremely partisan. In fact it was so partisan that the Republican campaign committee had prepared hit pieces to send to the voters in several swing districts the night of the vote. The floor debate on the bill stretched more than five hours, including a debate on a minority report (an alternative version of the bill), a motion to return the bill to committee, a motion to table the bill indefinitely, and on the final version of the bill. The bill passed 31-29 with four Democrats joining all of the Republicans voting against passage.

But here is what I want to share about that experience. During the long debate, which lasted from 11am until late into the afternoon, the Speaker brought lunch for the members into her office, which is attached to the chamber. And Democrats and Republicans ate together in small groups, amicably chatting about everything but the bill being discussed on the floor. The wonderful thing is that we generally like each other and we have found ways to work together so we can all achieve our objectives.

Each committee in this House has a Democratic and a Republican vice-chair and, at least in my committee, we work together to assure that generally speaking bills proposed by members of both parties get proper hearings, and whenever possible get passed out of committee. I particularly value the work of the Republican members of my committee, which include a physician, a dentist, and a psychologist.

The most popular topic of my email over the past couple of weeks relates to funding the K-12 budget. The co-chairs budget outline provides \$7.235 billion for schools, which the Legislative Fiscal Office believes represents a no-cuts budget and includes the \$50 million we added during the special session and money to support full-day kindergarten. The problem arose when the Department of Education calculated that \$7.5 billion was needed to create a no-cuts budget. The main difference between those numbers relates to the fact that the two budget estimates begin with different guesses on the total revenue raised by local property tax collections. I will follow this budget issue as it emerges; although it probably will not get finally determined until we find out in May

whether the kicker will kick. In the meantime you probably don't need to send me email reminding me to continue to fight for more money for schools. I will certainly do what I can to help that situation.

On the other hand, don't hesitate to send email on any topic you desire.

Mitch