



State Representative **Mitch Greenlick**

The MitchMessage

April 19, 2015

My next two town halls will be on April 25. The first will be held at 11 am Saturday at Friendly House, NW. 26th and NW Thurman. The second one will be at 2pm that same day (with Rep. Ken Helm) at the St. Vincent Hospital Souther Auditorium in the East Pavilion.

There was an article in the Oregonian a few days ago commenting on the extreme partisan nature of the legislature. As I read the article it did not seem to accurately reflect the situation as I have observed it, although I noticed almost every quote was about partisanship in the Senate. The article really got me thinking. My experience is from both the minority and the majority. I have served two terms in the minority, four terms in the majority and one term in a House tied 30-30. Two things come immediately to mind. First there is a difference between being in the minority and the majority. Second, Democrats and Republicans tend to look at things differently in many ways, especially around the role of government.

Certainly the majority matters. The majority party controls the process, naming the speaker and all of the committee chairs. The committee chairs have a lot of power over the legislative agenda, controlling which bills have a hearing and which are brought to a vote. That power can be used to facilitate collaboration, or sometimes not so much. Sometimes the philosophical differences between the Ds and the Rs matters a great deal, but mostly it is not the determining factor on the votes on specific bills.

My intern did an analysis of the first 100 sponsored bills (not bills introduced by a committee) that passed out of the House. Each bill has a set of chief sponsors, the people who craft the bill and help it move through the process. A bill generally has from one to three chief sponsors, and usually has some number of co-sponsors. Of the first 100 bills that passed out of the House, 46 had at least one Republican chief sponsor. You do not read about those bills in the Oregonian. The news media covers the dramatic partisan fights on the floor debating those bills the majority believes need to move and the minority presents solid opposition. That is in a small minority of bills, but even on those bills the debate is usually calm and relatively cordial. That was not always the case. One session when I was in the minority, the majority would quickly cut off debate on many bills, causing a great deal of frustration. I do not remember a motion to cut off debate in the last four sessions. We have had debates this session that have lasted for more than three hours. But every member had a chance to voice their opinion.

In summary, it is obviously better to be in the majority, but it is my experience that there is a consistent effort to give minority House members access to the process and to value their input.

An interesting example of collaboration was the process for considering HB 2300, a bill sponsored by the House Health Care Committee. This bill was referred to as the "right to try" bill. It would allow people with terminal medical conditions to get access to drugs that are in the FDA approval process, but have not yet been approved. I worked on this bill, which had strong support from the Cascade Policy Institute, a local conservative think tank. It also had support from the left. I asked Rep. Knute Buehler, a Republican from Bend and a physician, to lead the effort to perfect the bill. He worked

out a bill acceptable to the various interest groups. The bill passed out of the committee unanimously. Rep. Buehler carried the bill on the floor of the House where it passed 59-0. That has been a common situation in my committee. The committee has been very effective this year, to some extent because of the effort of the Republican members, including a physician, a dentist, and a psychologist.

During the last couple of weeks the House passed several other Health Care Committee bills. HB 2605 was introduced by Rep. Rob Nosse, my Democratic committee vice-chair. (Rep. Cedric Hayden, a dentist, is the Republican vice-chair.) Rep. Nosse's bill was designed to improve the way that the Oregon Insurance Division considers health insurance rate increase proposals. The bill provides more transparency and streamlines the process. He worked hard to get a bill upon which all sides could agree. Rep. Nosse carried it on the House Floor and it passed 56-3.

An important bill, HB 3517, had a somewhat more difficult passage. This bill was jointly sponsored by Rep. Keny-Guyer, Republican Rep. Vic Gilliam, and me. It authorized the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to develop health care programs for kids who are not eligible for Medicaid, including children of undocumented parents. The bill does not propose any specific programs, it only gives the OHA the authority needed for planning. With things like measles epidemics hitting Oregon it is necessary for OHA to have the capability to address the health care problems of all of our children. Even though a Republican representative led the relatively calm floor debate, the 36-22 vote split mostly along party lines.

Two of my higher education bills passed out of the House since my last MitchMessage. Since we provided local governing boards for our state universities, system-wide policy has fallen to the Higher Education Coordinating Council. Both of my bills relate to the HECC. HB 3335 directs the HECC to address a problem that was brought to my attention by a constituent. A student who enrolls in a community college and successfully completes a two-year course of study is awarded an associate of arts degree. On the other hand, a student who enrolls in a state university, takes exactly the same classes for two years, but later drops out of the university without getting a degree, gets no recognition for the accomplishment. The bill, which passed 58-2 in the House, asks the HECC to work with the universities to propose some form of recognition similar to the AA degree awarded by the community colleges for the same achievement.

Several years ago I passed a bill that requires state universities to interview at least one minority candidate when hiring a head coach or athletic director. This is known as the Rooney Rule, and has worked pretty well. But with the passing of the Oregon University System there is no consistent oversight for the statute. HB 2561, which passed 54-6, asks the HECC to consider alternatives for oversight and recommend a solution to the legislature.

This week marked the halfway point in the regular session. At this time the House begins to consider bills that have passed out of the Senate. One such major Senate bill is SB 941, the gun background check bill. We have already gotten hundreds of emails and phone calls on that bill. Consequently, I am expecting an exciting few days as the bill begins to get House consideration. While most of my SB 941 messages have not come from my constituents, I have tried to respond to those that have. But whatever your position on this or other matters I appreciate hearing from my constituents.

Mitch