



State Representative **Mitch Greenlick**

The MitchMessage **2015 Session in Review**

I have two town halls scheduled with Senator Elizabeth Steiner-Hayward. The first will be on Aug. 10 at 7pm in the Good Samaritan Medical Center Auditorium at 1040 NW. 22nd Ave. The second will be on Aug. 11 at 7pm at the Leedy Grange on the NW. corner of NW. Cornell and Saltzman Rd.

As I began contemplating the events of the 2015 legislative session I couldn't help looking back to the six previous sessions in which I have served. I began my legislative career in 2003, serving my first two terms in the minority. Since 2005 the Democrats have held the majority, with the exception of 2011, when the House was split 30-30. Because Democrats increased their majority in both the House and the Senate in the 2014 elections there was an expectation that it would be possible to pass a number of bills that had been debated during that election campaign. And to some extent that was the case.

This session felt quite busy. There were 2646 bills introduced into the House and the Senate, not counting memorials and resolutions and 846 of them passed out of the Legislature to the Governor's desk. In the 2013 session the comparable numbers were 2515 and 794. We passed almost exactly 30% of the bills introduced in each session. That means we voted more than 1000 times on the floor and in committee during the course of the session. And we had probably that many meetings, as there were people desperate to share their opinion with me on those bills.

Reviewing the legislative accomplishments of the session I realize there were some bills that passed after furious partisan debates, but the vast majority of those 846 successful bills had at least moderate, bipartisan support. Two bills that fit the former category were the clean fuels bill, which passed early in the session, and the gun sale background check bill, which passed later. Each of these bills engendered about five hours of raging, mostly partisan debate in the House and the Senate. Each bill passed the House with a couple of Democrats voting no. They both passed the Senate after equally acrimonious debate.

We had many important successes during this session, including a number of excellent funding decisions. We passed the K-12 education budget early in the session, providing a record funding level for the schools (\$7.3 billion) and we provided additional revenue to the schools after an excellent May revenue forecast. That forecast, reporting excellent economic news, also triggered the personal kicker. We provided increased support for our state universities and community colleges, increased resources for the Oregon Opportunity grants, and provided support for full-day kindergarten. We funded a program to begin exploring providing free community college tuition for low-income students.

We provided \$300 million to improve school safety, including \$170 million for school building seismic improvements, although we did not appropriate the \$300 million needed for seismic upgrades for the Capitol building. The Capitol was built in the 1930s and is extremely vulnerable to earthquake damage. Speaking of earthquake-vulnerable buildings we did however provide funding for the new Multnomah County Court House. And in one of the final bills of the session we approved the bonding authority that I requested for \$1.5 million for support of the development of a Forest Park Interpretative Center in my district.

Among the significant accomplishments of the session included programs designed to help low to middle income working men and women. We passed a bill that will provide paid sick leave for many Oregonians and a new program to allow employees to sign up for an employee-paid retirement security plan when they have no other access to a retirement plan. And we passed an important bill that will make it somewhat easier for people getting out of prison to find a job as they return to their communities. A critical element in keeping people from returning to prison is their ability to find a stable job.

The session produced some environmental successes beyond clean fuel standards. After working on the bill for four sessions we finally passed the toxic-free-kids program. This requires manufacturers to report to the Oregon Health Authority any toxic materials that are used in products designed for children's use. It also requires that after a few years the toxic material be eliminated from the production process if there is an economically feasible way to do so.

There has been increasing concern about oil train disasters. Consequently, we passed a measure to give the Oregon Fire Marshall's office the authority and the tools needed to develop response plans to protect communities from catastrophic damage. And we passed a bill on behalf of our rural citizens that addressed an issue under dispute since I joined the House. That bill would allow self-service gasoline service at rural stations after hours.

I was pleased with the ability of my office to move our legislative agenda. We introduced 37 bills. Some of the proposals were left over from prior sessions, some introduced at the request of constituents or other Oregonians, and some were our very own ideas, newly minted for this session. We passed 15 of these bills to the Governor's desk.

My most important of these bills is HB 3100B, the public health modernization bill, which passed its final hurdle the last week of the session. The final step for the bill was a motion I made in the House to accept a Senate amendment and re-pass the bill. The motion passed by a vote of 59-1. This bill resulted from one I passed in the 2013 session to form a commission on the future of our public health system. The commission was formed, chaired by Deschutes County Chair Tammy Baney, and the group produced an extraordinary report. The report outlined the shortcomings of Oregon's governmental public health system, defining the fundamental public health services each Oregonian should expect with the outline of a plan to move Oregon to a new system. The bill, crafted by legislative counsel Mark Mayer, was modeled as closely as possible to the report. It was improved by suggestions from stakeholders and ultimately was supported by all. It ended up 84 pages long, causing Senator Chuck Thomsen to declare on the floor he was voting no on the basis of his principle to vote no on any bill more than 65 pages long. Good thing he wasn't there when I passed HB 2009 (in 2009), creating the Oregon Health Authority. That bill was 632 pages long.

Included among other important bills I passed was HB 2551A, a bill I had tried to pass unsuccessfully for four sessions. That bill is designed to improve the protection of personal health data maintained in hospital and health insurance plans. This is a growing problem as health data is increasingly vulnerable to hackers. We passed HB2560A, designed to improve access to colorectal screening. This bill was stimulated by a research project at the Kaiser Permanente Center for Health Research and was strongly supported by the health and health insurance lobby groups. I worked on SB 1A with Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson. It was one of the most newsworthy bills of the session. It abolished Cover Oregon and transferred the health insurance exchange function to the Department of Consumer and Business Services. The transfer went smoothly and we now have more than 110,000 Oregonians enrolled in health insurance through the exchange.

Other bills I passed include helping employees retain health insurance coverage while on leave from a job, providing access to less expensive prescription drugs for Coordinated Care Organizations serving Oregon Health Plan members, and two bills dealing with improving the availability of nursing services and nursing instruction. I also passed legislation, supported by AARP, which helps hospitals plan for orienting informal caregivers as they take their loved ones home from a hospital stay.

Two of my bills relate to the Higher Education Coordinating Council (HECC). One bill asks the HECC to work with the universities to create a certification for students who have successfully completed

two years in college. The community colleges award an associate of arts degree after two years. But if a student takes those same courses at PSU or OSU and then has to leave college, he or she gets nothing to signify their achievement. That really seems unfair. The other bill asks the HECC to begin to monitor the universities performance under the "Rooney Rule," the requirement that state universities interview at least one minority candidate when hiring a head coach or athletic director. The monitoring function was in the State Board of Higher Education, but that body is no longer functioning in its old form.

Much of my work during the session relates to my role as chair of the House Health Care Committee. Committees have the authority to directly introduce bills. When a bill is introduced by the Health Care Committee it becomes my responsibility as chair, with the help of the committee administrator, Sandy Thiele-Cirka, and my legislative staff person, Justin Freeman, to shepherd the bill if it is to move. We were able to move several important health care committee bills this session. Two bills (HB 2028A and HB 3879B) expanded the role of pharmacists in our health care system by giving them clinical care responsibilities and by authorizing them to prescribe hormonal contraceptive products for women 18 years of age and older.

We passed HB 2300B. This is a relatively controversial bill, supported by politically conservative and politically liberal groups. This so-called Right to Try bill provides a mechanism for patients with fatal illnesses to have access to drugs that have not yet cleared the FDA's clinical trials process. Two physicians in the Legislature, Rep. Knute Buehler and Senator Elizabeth Steiner Hayward, worked very hard to craft a bill that would stand up to legal and ethical challenges. It then passed easily in the House and the Senate.

We left enough work to continue in the short session in February. Each member will only be able to introduce two bills and each committee three. That will focus us, but we have a relative short time to do our work. I have begun work on issues for the 2017 session, including the extraordinarily high cost of prescription drugs and the state of our mental health system. Keep in touch.

Mitch