



## State Representative **Mitch Greenlick**

### ***The MitchMessage*** **May 10, 2015**

There has been plenty of excitement around the Capitol since my last *MitchMessage*. That is not unexpected, as we are in the fourth month of a five-month legislative session and are finishing work on most of the bills that have originated in the House. All of the policy committees have completed their work on House bills and have begun processing bills sent over from the Senate. However, a few of the tough ones have just begun to hit the floor for debate and action.

The most acrimonious debate during the last couple of weeks, however, came on a bill originating in the Senate, SB 941A. That is the bill requiring background checks on the sale or transfer of guns between private individuals. Currently, the same background checks are required on gun sales in gun shops and at gun shows.

In the last message I argued that most measures passed out of the House were not primarily distinguished by a strictly partisan debate. This measure was certainly a partisan debate, even though surveys, such as a recent Oregonian report, indicate an over-whelming majority of Oregonians support background checks that help to keep guns out of the hands of felons and mentally ill people. However, the long debate indicated a large philosophical gulf between the Republican members of the House and most Democrats. The mostly polite debate lasted five hours with more than sixty speeches, not including one by me, expounding on the issue. The debate included the introduction of two different minority reports, introduced as possible substitutes to the main bill. The debate also featured the introduction of two parliamentary motions, one to refer the bill back to committee and one to postpone debate indefinitely. Each of those efforts was defeated, 25-35 along strict party lines. The bill ultimately passed 32-28 with three Democrats voting with all 25 Republicans.

Email played an interesting role in this debate. In the couple of weeks between when the bill passed out of the Senate and when it was debated in the House, I received more than 1000 emails opposing the bill from all over the state. Very few in that onslaught were from my district. On the other hand I received a few dozen emails from my district supporting the bill. I did not count specifically, but I would guess the emails from my district ran about 10 to one supporting the bill. Ironically, since we passed the bill, I have received several hundred emails from all over the state thanking me for voting yes on the bill. I wonder why I hadn't heard from those people before the debate. We have been deleting messages from that onslaught as fast as we did those earlier negative emails from around the state.

Another factor contributing to the excitement in the Capitol last week was the announcement by the Supreme Court of their decision on a suit challenging the Legislature's decision reducing the cost-of-living increases on PERS Tier one pensions. It was a complex decision, leaving some elements of the legislation in force and striking down other elements. What is clear is that it reinstated the 2% COLA for current retirees and for much of the pension of future Tier one retirees. The Court decision upheld the elimination of the "tax remedy program" that provided extra payments to retirees living out of state. The PERS agency has some complicated calculations to do to determine unpaid COLA amounts that will be returned to current retirees. (Incidentally, I voted against the COLA reduction during the 2013 special session largely because I did not think it would stand up to a court challenge.)

The decision will not affect the 2015-2017 budget because the PERS rates have already been set for the coming biennium, but could have an effect as high as \$500 million on the 2017-2019 biennium's budget. And even with the Court decision, the Oregon pension fund is among the top five state pension plans in terms of their solvency rating.

Along with these high-octane activities we passed some excellent bills that will make a difference in the lives of Oregonians. We passed HB 2571A out of the Judiciary Committee and off the floor of the House. That bill, which was supported by ACLU and police groups as well, set the dimensions of policies that need to be put in place before a law enforcement agency issues body cameras to its officers. It does not mandate the use of body cameras. But if the decision is made to use them it deals with such issues as when a camera should be turned on and off and how the data should be stored and used. We hear the Portland Police Bureau is anxious to begin using body cameras. We heard testimony in committee that data indicate there is a significant reduction in the use of force with body cameras, both on the part of police officers and on the part of the public.

We passed several bills that were very important to the Women's Health Caucus, including HB 3343A and HB 2758A. The former requires insurers to cover a twelve-month supply of oral contraceptives once a woman has successfully used the product for three months or more. The bill passed on a 55-2 vote with only Julie Parrish and Bill Post voting against it. HB 2758A did not have such an easy time, as it turned into a partisan debate, which included the introduction of a minority report. This bill started out as a simple bill, which would allow a person covered on a health insurance policy as a dependent to request that any Explanation of Benefits (EOB) be sent directly to them, rather than to the subscriber. Since the EOB could contain personal health information that bill was drafted as a confidentiality bill. It was designed particularly to protect women who are separated from their husbands from having their data sent to him. But the debate quickly turned into a discussion about teenagers receiving health care services without their parent's knowledge. I co-carried the bill out of my committee and tried to keep the debate calm. But I pretty much failed to do so. The bill passed along party lines on a 34-25 vote.

We passed several bills that could bring dramatic changes to our state, if passed in the Senate and signed by the Governor. HB 3414A will require drivers on freeways or four-lane highways to stay out of the left lane except to pass. This engendered a close vote (33-26), but not a party-line vote. I expect it faces an uncertain fate in the Senate. Two other landmark bills passed easily. HB 3347A would change the facts to be considered when a person is facing civil commitment to a mental hospital. Currently a person can only be committed if that person is an immediate threat to themselves or others. This bill, which passed 57-3, adds the concept that a person can be committed if they are not able to provide for their own basic needs and are in danger of serious harm in the near future. Finally, we passed HB 2028A, on a 60-0 vote. The bill allows pharmacists to begin to provide a variety of clinical services directly to patients under an agreement with a physician or a group of physicians. Members of my committee have been working on that bill for six years.

As we get busy on bills that have already passed the Senate (and we have about 40 of them assigned to my Health Care Committee), I look forward to hearing from you if you have any concerns about the bills we are considering.

Finally, I wish the mothers who read this message a Happy Mother's Day.

***Mitch***