



State Representative **Mitch Greenlick**

The MitchMessage May 31, 2015

This is the time of year when the mood in the Capitol begins to shift once again. The prevailing mood during the first month or two of the session had a somewhat frenetic feeling. The excitement of the new members as they began to learn the system, the hopeful sense of all members as we introduced our legislative agenda, and the beginning of the development of a new social structure accommodating the loss of previous members and the addition of new members. Then we all settled down to the work of sitting in committees, talking to lobbyists, answering email, and considering votes on the floor as bills began to work their way through the process. The end of session seemed a long way away during the wet, dark days of winter.

But last week the sense became palpable that the end of session was near, including the traditional formal announcement of the fact, which changed some of the rules of the House to take that into account. The current target date for adjournment sine die (without a date) is June 26. While our constitutionally required last day is July 11, we are likely to be done closer to the former than the later. The mood I feel is a combination of relief and panic. Relief for many because sine die means they can get back to their "real life", practicing law, ranching, or engaging in the many other regular occupations of my colleagues. The panic comes from the realization that the time for movement of any legislative proposals that have not yet moved out of the legislature is getting increasingly limited.

June 5 is the last day bills assigned to policy committees can be moved. Any bills that are in any committee other than the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, or the House and Senate Revenue, or Rules committees die on Friday. At the moment I still have a couple of bills in mortal danger. After June 5 we all begin to work on bills in those committees, especially on bills in Ways and Means. Any bill that has significant fiscal impact goes to W&M.

That is the current home of my most important bill, HB 3100, the bill to modernize Oregon's public health system. The problem of getting bills out of Ways and Means is that the committee's primary function is to produce a balanced budget and doing that while trying to fit in policy bills with budget impact is not an easy task. HB 3100 has a \$500,000 price tag for the next biennium, with possible greater impact for future budgets. But the bill has support from the Governor, from Oregon's counties, and from Democratic and Republican Senators and House members who are sponsors of the bill.

The May revenue forecast provides the revenue number for the 2015-17 budget. And that forecast provided good news. Oregon's economy continues to improve, driven by new jobs, reduced unemployment, and higher wages. The forecast provided more than \$450 million additional revenue over the starting forecast for the 2015-17 budget and an increase of \$245 million from the March forecast. The bill we passed early in the session to fund K-12 schools provided that 40% of that increase, an extra \$105 million, would go to schools.

The revenue forecast also had a significant impact on the current budget period as it caused the kicker to kick. The individual kicker will produce a total personal income tax credit of \$473 million. The funds will be distributed in the form of a tax credit on the 2015 personal income tax return. The amount will be based on an individual's 2015 income. The corporate kicker of \$61 million also kicked. As a result of 2012's Measure 85 those funds automatically go to the State School Fund.

Aside from the development of the budget there are still many important policy issues to be addressed by the House, the Senate or both. Among issues awaiting final consideration are paid sick time, transportation funding, retirement security, health care coverage for all kids, protecting college kids from price gouging, criminal justice transparency, expanding access to birth control, and patient privacy issues.

Several of my personal bills are also waiting final action, including a bill to provide certification for college kids who have successfully completed their lower division studies, and a bill to provide for officials of secular organizations to solemnize marriages. Several of my bills have, however, moved on to the Governor's desk, including a bill to improve the process of rehabilitating people who have been judged to be guilty except for insanity. Other of my bills that have moved through the process include legislation to improve colorectal cancer screening in Oregon, a skin cancer prevention bill, and a bill to help protect personal health information.

We have had some serious debates in the House since the last *MitchMessage*. We passed sweeping legislation (HB 2546B) to regulate e-cigarettes including regulating their use under the Indoor Clean Air provisions of Oregon statutes and prohibiting their sale to children. The process of passing that legislation took a great deal of patience and skill on the part of the advocates for that bill. I was delighted to pass it out of my committee as the first step in the process.

The House also debated and passed on to the Senate HJR 31 that would send to the voters a constitutional amendment giving the Legislature the power to impeach any of the statewide office holders. The measure passed 47-12 with broad bipartisan support. I voted against the measure. I am very proud of the "Oregon System" of initiative, referendum, and recall. I think the threat of recall helped Governor Kitzhaber decide to resign. But having watched the Clinton-era impeachment circus it feels as if impeachment is far too prone to political theatre. I think the measure came about as a reaction to the Kitzhaber fiasco, but I would prefer we let that matter rest a bit before we make a critical decision to change the constitution.

There were also a few debates that got me thinking about why some members vote in what feels like an odd vote. Many of the measures that pass the House gather one or two no votes, when the vast majority of the members vote yes. These are generally non-controversial issues. And sometimes you can understand the vote. Some members vote against any fee increase, even ones that have been requested by those being charged. But sometime it is hard to understand why. I carried a bill that required anybody identifying himself or herself as a nurse to actually be a nurse. The bill got one no vote from a member who later reported he had voted no because he favored "freedom." But I was more startled by a bill that gathered 13 Republican no votes. It was a bill to require health professionals to report demographic and practice information when they renewed their licenses. It was a bill intended to gather information needed to improve rural health care. And each of the members who voted against the bill is from a rural area. So I decided to ask some of them why they voted against the bill when it was designed to help rural health care. First I asked a member of the Health Care Committee who had voted yes in committee as a part of a unanimous committee vote. He said he had voted no by mistake. Then I asked another member about the no votes and was informed that some Republican members automatically voted no on any bill that was related to the Oregon Health Authority. Go figure!!!

Keep in touch as the session winds down. There should be many exciting moments yet.

Mitch