



OREGON HOUSE REPUBLICAN OFFICE

For Immediate Release
Tuesday, April 7, 2015
Contact: Kara Walker, 407-929-6727
kara.walker@state.or.us

House Republicans Introduce Meaningful And Comprehensive Ethics Reform Package

Request Scheduled Public Hearings And Work Sessions For Proposals

Salem, OR – Acting on their commitment to restore trust, accountability and transparency in state government, House Republicans today introduced a set of ethics reform proposals that aim to establish clear guidelines for public officials, hold public officials accountable for unethical conduct, and update antiquated, hard-to-navigate public records request processes.

“Oregonians expect and deserve good state government that is open and honest,” said Deputy House Republican Leader Carl Wilson (R-Grants Pass). “While there is merit and good intention behind Governor Brown’s ethics proposals, this package of bills introduced today by House Republicans represents meaningful reform that holds accountable all branches of state government and puts into place real mechanisms to ensure transparency and oversight. We look forward to getting these proposals scheduled for public hearings and work sessions so that we can continue the discussion of substantive ethics reform with our colleagues and constituents.”

In contrast to the proposals put forth by Governor Kate Brown, the House Republican Ethics Reform Package includes proposals that pertain to both the executive branch and legislative branch, such as proposals that increase access to public records, establish clear guidelines for the role of the First Spouse, and increase protection for “whistleblower” employees who expose criminal and unethical behavior in state government.

The package of proposals include:

- [House Bill 3331](#), which authorizes the Legislative Assembly to appoint an independent counsel by joint resolutions;
- [House Bill 3505](#), which requires public bodies to establish public records retention schedules that require a minimum three-year retention of public records;
- [House Bill 2790](#), which requires that statements made by certain witnesses to a committee of the Legislative Assembly be made under oath and therefore subject to crime of false swearing;
- [House Bill 2791](#), which includes false statements made to legislative committees by certain persons in crime of unsworn falsification;
- [House Bill 3043](#), which provides that upon being sworn into office, or for other stated reasons, the Governor shall file declaration with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission declaring identity of First Spouse and identifying official policy-making or agenda-setting duties of First Spouse, if any; and,

- A priority bill request that will strengthen public employee whistleblower statutes.

“Oregon has been ranked one of the most transparent states in the nation, but we’ve now seen that’s not the case. Ethics reform should not be a partisan issue, but it should be an issue that we take seriously as legislators and representatives of the people of this state,” said Representative Julie Parrish (R-West Linn/Tualatin), who is the chief sponsor of several of the bills. “These proposals represent good, strong policies that are steps we need to take if we want to reestablish trust with the people of Oregon and move our state forward. If we leave this session and don’t do meaningful ethics reform, any trust the public may still have for government will be further diminished.”

One of Rep. Parrish’s cornerstone proposals, [HB 3505](#), seeks to drastically improve Oregon’s public records request process by increasing access to state records created by public officials, including legislators, by removing certain time and cost barriers that currently impede the process. Rep. Parrish’s other cornerstone proposal, HB 3043, aims to increase transparency and remove conflicts of interest at the executive branch level by putting into place a procedure to establish a clear set of guidelines for the First Spouse to adhere to should he or she decide to engage in state government activities as a public official.

In addition to the five bills already proposed and submitted, Representative Knute Buehler (R-Bend) has filed a priority bill to increase protections for public employees that alert or are seeking to alert authorities or others of criminal or unethical activity in state government. Currently being finalized by Legislative Counsel, Rep. Buehler’s bill would prohibit the use of law enforcement by public employers in retaliation on a suspected whistleblower employee and ensure significant compensatory damages for employees that are wrongfully retaliated against for their actions.

“According to recently disclosed public documents and records, the number of red flags raised over the past several years by state government employees over questionable conduct in the executive branch and in state agencies is astounding. Yet, little was done to truly investigate these claims, perhaps out of fear of retaliation or termination,” said Rep. Buehler. “We should not be punishing these honest, hard-working individuals who want to report waste or unethical behavior when they see it. I’m hopeful that my colleagues will move this common-sense proposal forward so we can better protect those working on behalf of the people of Oregon.”

House Republicans will continue to work with legislative leadership to secure public hearings and work sessions for these proposals. Additionally, another House Republican-sponsored measure with bipartisan support, [HJR-31](#), which creates a process to impeach statewide elected executive branch officials in the state of Oregon, is expected to receive a public hearing next week in the House Committee on Rules.

###