



OREGON HOUSE REPUBLICAN OFFICE

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In Case You Missed It
“Democrats should consider GOP reforms”

Editorial: Don't bury GOP reforms
[The Register-Guard](#)

“The first of Gov. Kate Brown’s three ethics reform bills reached her desk last week. With her fellow Democrats in control of both chambers of the Legislature, it’s a safe bet that the other two will soon follow.

Barring an unanticipated change of heart by Democratic leaders, it also seems a safe bet that most Republican ethics reform proposals will die in the committees where most have been languishing for weeks.

The exception may be a proposal, authored by Rep. Jodi Hack, a Salem Republican, to create an impeachment process. The House last month voted 41-12 to pass House Joint Resolution 31, which would refer a constitutional amendment to the 2016 ballot giving the Legislature the power to remove a sitting governor from office. The measure — which would also apply to the secretary of state, treasurer, attorney general and labor commissioner — awaits action in the Senate.

But prospects look dim to nonexistent for the other GOP ethics proposals.

That’s a mistake the governor and Democratic lawmakers should rectify before it’s too late. Reform of the state’s inadequate ethics laws should be a bipartisan effort in the wake of the scandal and influence-peddling allegations that led Gov. John Kitzhaber to resign in February. That’s the best way to reassure Oregonians that lawmakers, both Democrats and Republicans, are committed to ethics reform.

In her inaugural address, Brown proposed a modest but solid package of reforms. They included Senate Bill 9, which calls for an audit of state agencies handling public records, with recommendations for legislative changes to come in the 2016 session. SB 9 is awaiting the governor’s signature into law, and the governor’s other proposals, House Bills 2020 and 2019, recently cleared the House and are waiting for takeoff on the Senate tarmac.

The former would clarify that the governor’s spouse or partner is a public official who is subject to ethics rules, and would ban speaking fees for statewide officials. The latter would expand the Oregon Government Ethics Commission to nine members from seven, reduce the governor’s role in appointing members and shorten the time frame for investigations.

That’s a good start. But additional reforms are needed to prevent and combat corruption in Oregon, which until recently enjoyed a national reputation as a scandal-lite state.

One of the most promising Republican reform proposals would beef up whistle-blower protections for state employees. Sponsored by Rep. Knute Buehler, R-Bend, House Bill 3544 is based on the federal Sarbanes Oxley law and would provide state employees with protections similar to those guaranteed for employees of publicly traded companies.

Buehler recently called on the governor to support his proposal in light of prosecutors' decision not to press charges against state whistle-blower Michael Rodgers. Rodgers refused a request to delete 6,000 of Kitzhaber's emails from state servers and then leaked those emails to an Oregon newspaper.

Before prosecutors announced their decision, Buehler became one of the first elected officials to praise Rodgers' action and argue that he should not be prosecuted for leaking the emails. Brown also later said she did not think Rodgers should be charged. The governor should build on that common ground by urging Democratic leaders to support Buehler's proposal.

Other Republican proposals include legislation introduced by Rep. Julie Parrish, R-West Linn, which proposes immediate changes to public records laws, including reduced time-lines for processing requests for records and fee waivers in the event of long delays. Most of the changes recommended in House Bill 3505 could be approved by the Legislature without putting at risk the more sweeping reforms that might result from Brown's audit bill.

With the exception of the impeachment resolution, Democrats have taken a lamentably partisan approach to ethics reform. There's still time to change that and send a message to Oregonians that both Democrats and Republicans are united in their dedication to restore the public's trust in government."

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