

McLane defends Eastern Oregon, Republican goals

By DEVAN SCHWARTZ H&N Staff Reporter | Posted: Friday, February 22, 2013 12:00 am

SALEM — State Rep. Mike McLane is the first House Republican leader from east of the Cascades in 10 years, an important symbol in a politically divided state.

District 55 encompasses a vast swath of land that includes portions of Deschutes, Klamath, Lake and Jackson counties.

In a presentation Monday evening, McLane joked that Speaker of the House Tina Kotek, D-Dist. 44, could walk across her Portland district faster than he could drive across his. She didn't refute him. This means that McLane, a lawyer and an officer in the Air National Guard, has a lot of territory to represent and defend.

As Republicans are the minority in both state chambers (16-14 Senate and 34-26 House), McLane said he's learning to play a lot of defense.

House Democrats have wanted to move bills fast in the early weeks of the session and the pace has been notable. McLane said the majority of bills voted on have been quick fixes and nothing too controversial.

The first controversial bill will be debated today, he said. House Bill 2787 would allow undocumented immigrant students to receive in-state tuition rates from Oregon's public universities. However, students must attend U.S. schools for at least five years, graduate from an Oregon high school, and show an intention to get U.S. citizenship.

McLane said he plans to ask the Democratic leadership about an alternative bill introduced by the Republicans, including a stricter stipulation whereby undocumented students mandatorily enter the federal process for legalizing their status.

Asked about the Democrats' bill as written, McLane said his vote is "most likely a no," though he does recognize that these students represent the bright minds Oregon needs.

But voting is just the tip of the iceberg for the representative — policy and budget work are time-consuming and his capitol office buzzes with lobbyists, constituents and fellow caucus members seeking him out for advice and strategy.

"I'm juggling a lot of things and a lot of people, but I understood that coming in," McLane said.

And the House Republican leader is responsible for setting the opposition agenda, this session focusing on the reforms of the Public Employee Retirement System.

“Budget reform is required by math and math is not partisan,” McLane said. “There is a pretty serious gap in the current biennium budget and we need a serious conversation in the state about achieving reforms. But I’m not interested in increasing taxes until we have serious reforms to our cost drivers.”

Rep. McLane said Klamath County is in the crosshairs of budget shortfalls related to PERS. Public safety, basic services and education would continue to be among the items to see a cutback. With an aging population in the United States, he said the importance of creating a sustainable balance sheet is vitally important.

McLane recognizes the need for bipartisan support of reforms, and limitations to what the minority party can achieve alone. His strategy, he says, is “working to eliminate the bad bills and making the not-so-bad bills better.”

McLane said one particular area of legislative defense is against proposals for in-stream water banks. He argues that these water banks would come at the cost of supplying water for municipal, industrial and agricultural usages.

“We have to strike the right balance between stewardship of the environment with prosperity and opportunity for our children and grandchildren,” McLane said, “avoiding over-regulation and unintended consequences.”

As far as representing his own district, McLane said he is “pleased to provide a unique voice on policy and budget matters” and welcomes the input of his constituents.

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