

OSBA Legislative Highlights



the Promise
OF OREGON

January 16, 2015

Seventy-eighth Legislative Assembly begins

Oregon's 78th Legislative Assembly began this week in Salem with the usual pomp and circumstance of the beginning of a legislative session. The House of Representatives swore in all 60 members, with 15 new members in attendance following this fall's elections. Rep. Tina Kotek (D-Portland) was elected speaker of the House for a second time. The Senate swore in three new members and elected Sen. Peter Courtney (D-Salem) to a record-setting seventh term as Senate president. Additionally, Governor John Kitzhaber, M.D., was sworn in for a historic fourth term as Oregon's governor.

Speaking to the joint session of the Legislature, Governor Kitzhaber did not lay out his legislative agenda for the upcoming session, but instead spoke about disparities of people living in Oregon today. He noted that the Legislature faces the challenge of how to lift up the entire community, not just one sector. Kitzhaber stated, "In the midst of this economic recovery, a growing number of people are trapped in low-wage and/or part-time jobs on which they cannot support a family – and with no hope of getting ahead. Why?" He then quoted several statistics to bear out his point: one in five families are living in poverty, 30 percent of children don't have enough food, and unemployment rates are much higher for Latinos, Native Americans, African-Americans and for Oregonians with disabilities.

While the governor did not offer specific solutions to address these issues, he challenged legislators to ask the right questions and commit themselves to a common purpose. "I still believe that all of us want to rise above our own worst day and give something back to our families and to our community. And I still believe in the power of individuals – acting from courage and conviction – to change the world in which they live for the better. Let us commit ourselves to that; and to a common purpose to ensure that each and every one of us in this great state has an equal opportunity to meet their basic needs; to strive to reach their full potential; to have

hard work rewarded with a better life; and to leave their children better off than they were both economically and environmentally," Kitzhaber stated.

In addition to its opening session ceremonies, the Legislature introduced more than 1,200 bills in its first days of action. Many of these bills will impact public schools in Oregon; the OSBA Legislative Services team has reviewed all bills and is tracking close to 200 bills out of this first-introduced series. View OSBA's 2015 Session Bill Tracking here: www.osba.org/Resources/Article/Legislative/BillTracking.aspx?c=9999. Contact OSBA Deputy Executive Director Jim Green (jgreen@osba.org) with any questions about the bills.

As has been the practice for several sessions, the Legislature only met in its "organizational session" for three days and has adjourned until February 2, 2015. At that time, the Legislature will begin in earnest and should wrap up its work in late June or early July.

Ways and Means co-chairs unveil budget framework

The co-chairs of the Ways and Means Committee, Sen. Richard Devlin (D-Tualatin) and Rep. Peter Buckley (D-Ashland), revealed their budget framework for the upcoming session this week. This came much earlier in the process than has been past practice; both lawmakers called this a "plan to set the general parameters" of the budget work facing the 2015 Legislature.

In early December, the governor put forward his recommended budget that funded the State School Fund (SSF) for 2015-17 at a little more than \$6.9 billion, or only a four-percent increase over 2013-15. The co-chairs' framework places the SSF at a little above \$7.2 billion for the biennium. This amount includes \$220 million for the implementation of full-day kindergarten. In total, the co-chairs increased the SSF \$335 million above the governor's proposed budget. In addressing the budget, Sen. Devlin stated, "There are 10,000 decisions that need to be made, but we want to put education at the forefront

of our recommendations." However, Rep. Buckley also noted that the framework does not go far enough in the area of school funding. "This framework provides the outline to stabilize our K-12 budget and offer full-day kindergarten statewide. Because of limited resources, however, we cannot yet significantly reduce class sizes or add back school days," Buckley stated.

OSBA Executive Director Betsy Miller-Jones thanked the co-chairs for their leadership in working to turn around a decade of disinvestment in public education in Oregon. "The figures released today are substantially higher than the governor's proposal, and that's great news for Oregon students and their families," Miller-Jones said. "In the weeks and months ahead we are going to continue to make the case that the best investment Oregonians can make is in our students." Drawing from a public education support campaign (www.promiseoregon.org) OSBA launched in November, Miller-Jones referred to today's students as "The Promise of Oregon."

OSBA and other education partners have been working over the last several months to determine what would be an adequate amount in the SSF to ensure that schools could offer a full school year and not have to make reductions in staff, programs or school days over the next two years. "As we visited with school districts across Oregon this year, we asked them what it would take to continue what we were able to build back from last biennium's budget, add full-day kindergarten and ensure no loss of staff, programs or days. We were told the number needed to be in the \$7.5 billion range," OSBA Deputy Executive Director Jim Green stated. "We know that is a huge ask at the Legislature, but if we want to move forward, we know it requires a major investment in our public schools and that's what we will be asking for," Green added.

In order to make that additional investment, the co-chairs recognize things will need to look different in the revenue arena and stated, "We will not get to where we believe we need to be, especially in education and building adequate reserves, without significant revenue reform. Both of us have worked on the state budget for a number of years now, and we have been part of the reform efforts. It is clear to us that our state cannot have the education system it needs or the sustainable budget it needs without changes to our current revenue system."

Senate elects Courtney to historic seventh term, swears in new members

Sen. Peter Courtney (D-Salem) made history when the 78th Legislature kicked off January 12 with three "organizing days." The Salem Democrat was sworn in for a record-setting seventh time as the Senate president. In that office, he'll preside over the Senate in the 78th Legislative Session. Sen. Ginny Burdick (D-Portland) was again unanimously selected as the Senate president pro tempore. In this role, she'll step in for Courtney if he is unable to do his job as Senate president. Prior to the start of session, Senate Republicans selected Sen. Ted Ferrioli (R-John Day) to be their caucus leader.

As is customary with the beginning of a session, presiding officers offer opening remarks to the members of the Legislature. Courtney gave each legislator a squeezable toy donkey and elephant and used the gifts as props for his prepared remarks. Courtney listed the common attributes of each animal: The donkey and elephant are bold, strong, intelligent, smart, brave and loveable. They also have even more in common. They are pack animals, they pull wagons, each coexists in peace with other animals and each have their special place. "Remember," Courtney said, "don't think of how the donkey and elephant are different, but how they are alike."

The point of Courtney's gift and opening day remarks on donkeys and elephants was to urge Democrats and Republican to work together. "Today is about working across the aisle with renewed optimism. We believe we can work together ... so that is our job – to work together," Courtney said.

The "organizing" of the Senate included the swearing in of re-elected senators and new members Sara Gelser (D-Corvallis), Kim Thatcher (R-Keizer) and Chuck Riley (D-Hillsboro). Senators also approved Senate rules, received announcements of committee compositions, and had other caucus meetings and trainings.

Long-time followers of the Legislature commented that the squeezable elephants and donkeys may come in handy over the next several months to relieve the inevitable stress that comes with a legislative session.

Oregon House convenes, elects leaders

On January 12, the Oregon House of Representatives convened to organize and appoint committees, adopt rules, introduce bills, swear in members and choose legislators to fill key leadership posts. With a 35-25 Democratic majority, lawmakers chose State Rep. Tina Kotek (D-Portland) to serve as House speaker and State Rep. Val Hoyle (D-Eugene) to serve as House majority leader. House Republicans chose State Rep. Mike McLane (R-Powell Butte) to serve as their leader.

All three legislative leaders served in the same posts during the 2013 Session; 15 of the 60 members in the House were newly sworn in this week.

In her remarks to a joint session of the Oregon House and Senate, Speaker Kotek recalled the memory and legacy of former New York Governor Mario Cuomo:

“Last week, I was reading about the life and legacy of former New York Governor Mario Cuomo, who passed away on New Year’s Day.

‘Decide exactly what you want to achieve,’ he once famously said. ‘Do you want to help people, or do you want to be powerful?’

“Too many people believe that elected officials seek public office in pursuit of their own personal ambitions,” Kotek continued in her address. “I have seen the opposite – here in Oregon, here in the Oregon Legislature.”

She noted that in Oregon, people seek public office to do good things for their communities and the state. She encouraged her colleagues to get to work on the business of helping Oregonians be successful in their chosen pursuits.

After completing the business of organization, the House adjourned until February 2, when the work of the 2015 Session will really begin. Key committees that the Oregon School Boards Association’s Legislative Services Team will follow closely in the House include:

- House Education Committee, chaired by Rep. Margaret Doherty (D-Tigard);
- House Revenue Committee, chaired by Rep. Phil Barnhart (D-Eugene);
- Joint Ways and Means Committee, co-chaired by Rep. Peter Buckley (D-Ashland); and
- Ways and Means Education Subcommittee, chaired by Rep. Betty Komp (D-Woodburn)

Questions about legislative issues?

Contact the OSBA Legislative Services Team:

800-578-6722 or 503-588-2800

Jim Green jgreen@osba.org

Morgan Allen mallen@osba.org

Lori Sattenspiel lsattenspiel@osba.org

Contact your legislator

Find your legislators’ contact information on the Oregon Legislature’s website:

www.oregonlegislature.gov/FindYourLegislator/leg-districts.html

Click on your district on the map, then:

- For Representatives – click the House tab
- For Senators – click the Senate tab

To contact your legislator by phone, call the Capitol Switchboard at 1-800-332-2313.



Feb. 23, 2015
OSBA/COSA JOINT
LEGISLATIVE DAY
Register online: <http://bit.ly/15dNt2s>