

Shared Governance or Split Governance?

E-Newsletter April 4th, 2011

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

It hasn't been quite a week since my last update, but I wanted to give you a reminder about my Senior Town Hall coming up this Saturday, and give my thoughts on how the legislative process is playing out as we approach a critical deadline.

The legislative process for a bill involves many steps: bill concepts are developed and drafted; then the chief sponsors look for co-sponsors; then the bills are introduced; then they are referred to committees; then they have public hearings in committee; then they have “work sessions,” during which they can be amended and voted on; then they either go to the floor of the originating chamber (House or Senate) or to the Joint Ways and Means committee if they have direct financial costs to the state. Throughout this process, bills face various chokepoints and deadlines. One of these critical deadlines looms at the end of this week.

By the end of Friday, any bill that remains in committee will have to be scheduled for a work session, i.e., scheduled for a vote, if it is to move forward. If it does not appear on the posting list, it is probably dead for this session. Why would a bill not be posted at this point? One reason might be a signal that the bill doesn't have bipartisan support. (In the House, given that every committee has an equal number of Democrats and Republicans, it takes support from at least one member of the other party.) Another reason might be that one of the committee co-chairs refuses to allow the bill to advance. (Committee co-chairs have that authority.) Another might be that the proponents have simply not been working the bill hard enough.

Whenever one of these deadlines approach, the anxiety level within the Capitol begins to rise. Once the deadline passes, things relax a bit, as legislators let go of some of their concepts or try to figure out alternate routes for them.

Curious about a particular bill? Give my staff a call in our Capitol office at [503-986-1445](tel:503-986-1445). They'll help you track down any information you're interested in, including whether a bill is being threatened by this deadline and an honest assessment of its prognosis.

Or, for you DIY types: If you know the bill number, [go to the legislative website](#). Then click on “Search Measures by Specific Measure Number” and enter the necessary information. You'll then see whether or not the bill has had a public hearing and a work session or is scheduled to have one.

And for those of you who are wondering, I'm happy to report that my wife's transition home has been going great. She's hobbling around the house under her own power, exercising, getting physical therapy, and resting, getting a little stronger every day. I've been joking to people that I'm the people's servant by day, and Kiki's servant by night. And you know, I really can't complain!

Higher Education Bills at an Impasse

I mentioned at the beginning of this session that the 30-30 partisan split in the House could take us in one of two directions: towards shared governance or towards split governance. There were some promising signs early on, including a relatively painless selection process for our co-Speakers and many bills introduced with bipartisan sponsorship. But as we approach the deadline for posting work sessions, partisanship is unfortunately re-emerging, and many good bills are at risk of dying.

I'm proud to say that the House Subcommittee on Higher Education, of which I'm the Democratic Co-Chair, has been doing great work this session. We've been passing a number of good bills that expand opportunity and access to higher education for Oregonians, each of which has been passed unanimously by the subcommittee.

Unfortunately, according to House rules, every bill passed by the subcommittee must then be scheduled for a work session and voted on by the House Education Committee. I'm confident that every bill that we have passed in the subcommittee would be approved easily by the members of the full Education committee—as long as they are judged strictly on their merits (as I believe every bill should be). However, these bills have gotten stuck in some larger problems with the Education Committee and the desire by one of that committee's co-chairs that every proposed bill be “negotiated” as part of larger trade packages. This is an approach to legislating that I do not like.

Thus, for me, this is shaping up to be a very difficult week. I cannot believe that the Education Committee Co-Chairs will continue to hold up these good bills. I know that at least one of the Co-Chairs really wants to see these brought to a vote. I'll keep pushing them and Democratic and Republican leadership to get these bills moving before they become innocent victims of Friday's posting deadline. I'll let you know next week how it goes.

Senior Town Hall II: This Saturday

A couple of months ago, I held a Town Hall with Sen. Jackie Dingfelder and neighboring Rep. Ben Cannon that was focused on issues impacting seniors as we headed into the legislative session. Now that we're approaching the halfway point of the session, it's time to come back together and have an update on how legislation and

the budget discussions around senior programs are shaping up. Please join the three of us for “part two” of the Senior Town Hall on Saturday

April 9th. We’ll be meeting up at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church (11229 NE Prescott St.) from 10:00 to 11:30 AM. I hope to see you Saturday.

The Lund Report

I want to bring your attention to a website that came up at my constituent coffee this past Saturday (thanks to those who joined us). [The Lund Report](#) is a nonprofit online news source dedicated to health care policy, with a special focus on Oregon. It’s a great resource and I encourage you to bookmark it and make it one of your regular stops for online news.

Night Hearings on DHS Budget Continue

The Human Services Subcommittee of Ways & Means has been holding night hearings to take public input on the DHS budget. Tomorrow night, the hearing will be focused on the budget for Children, Adults and Families, including TANF. The TANF program provides cash assistance to low-income families with children while they strive to become self-sufficient. The program's goal is to reduce the number of families living in poverty, through employment and community resources. Many families in the TANF program receive help with needs such as employment, housing, child care, domestic violence and other factors that affect family stability.

TANF, like most programs under DHS, is facing significant budget cuts that will restrict eligibility, reducing the number of families receiving assistance. If you'd like to voice your opinion on the proposed TANF cuts, you can sign up to give testimony at tomorrow night's meeting. Testimony is being limited to three minutes per person, due to the number of people interested in speaking.

The hearing will be in Hearing Room F in the Capitol, from 5:30 to 7:00 PM tomorrow (Tuesday) night. If you need more information, call my office.

See you Saturday,

Michael