

Senator Brown to Chair Rules Committee

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Senate President Peter Courtney (D-Salem) announced today that Senate Majority

Leader Kate Brown (D-Portland) will chair the Senate Committee on Rules during the 2007 legislative session. Immediately following the announcement, Brown said that closing loopholes in current ethics and lobbying laws will be a top priority for the committee.

“There are a number of inconsistencies, intended or not, that exist in current Oregon law, which has not been updated since the Watergate era,” said Brown. “In particular, the reporting rules governing gifts and meals from lobbyists are a confusing mess that even the sharpest legal minds have a difficult time navigating.”

For example, current law requires lobbyists to report meals attended by public officials, but there is no reciprocal mechanism for public officials to report such meals.

To address inadequacies in current law, Brown and Senator Betsy Johnson (D-Scappoose) championed funding last session for a special review of ethics laws by the Oregon Law Commission. The Commission’s work has revealed numerous examples of ethics and lobbying rules that are confusing and hard to follow.

“To be blunt, some exemptions in current law are big enough to drive a truck through,” said Brown. Brown welcomed the work of the Law Commission, which has put forward a slate of recommendations for the Legislature to consider, but she emphasized the need to go even further than the Commission’s recommendations.

“The Law Commission’s work has given us a great starting point, and we will move aggressively in

the Rules Committee to build on that work," said Brown. "We will also be looking at a number of strong proposals from other groups and individuals, including legislative leaders here in Oregon and our counterparts in other states who have recently wrestled with some of these same issues."

Senator Laurie Monnes Anderson (D-Gresham), who will join Brown and Johnson on the Rules Committee, echoed the call for change:

"As a member of the Senate Rules committee, I look forward to passing major ethics reform legislation," said Monnes Anderson. "We need to clarify, simplify, and tighten the reporting rules for public officials as part of a complete ethics reform package that brings increased certainty and accountability to the process."

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