

Oregon legislature adjourns sine die

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

The Oregon Senate and House adjourned sine die Thursday afternoon, concluding the regular session of the 74th Legislative Assembly. The session, which began on January 8, lasted 172 days, making it the shortest session since 1995. By adjourning today, the legislature will save Oregon taxpayers an estimated \$998,000 in operating costs over the last legislative session.

Session highlights include a strong commitment to education, health care, consumer protection, landmark family equality legislation, updates to Oregon's Bottle Bill, a Rainy Day Fund, and the Clean-Indoor Air Act.

"The general session has ended, but the hard work continues," said Senate President Peter Courtney (D-Salem/Gervais/Woodburn). "We are on a historic march. We accomplished a lot this session, but the next several months will be critical as we prepare for our great experiment in February."

“Members of the House stepped up to pass great legislation on behalf of the people of this state,” said House Speaker Jeff Merkley (D-Portland). “But our toughest challenge, and the one we will continue to pursue, is restoring Oregonians’ faith and trust in their legislature. We took significant strides in that direction, but there is more work to be done.”

The Legislature continued the tradition of holding committee hearings in different cities to create more opportunities for Oregonians to participate. During the session, House and Senate committees met outside of Salem on 25 different occasions in 13 different cities. In April, the Senate President and Speaker led a delegation of House and Senate members on a five county tour to hear from local officials about the major problems caused by the loss of Federal timber dollars.

While the 74th Legislative session is complete, members will continue working hard over the next 7 months. For the first time, the Legislature will reconvene in February 2008 for a supplemental session. Members will spend the next 7 months serving on interim committees. The committees will consider a broad range of issues and draft legislation so the Legislature can hit the ground running in February.

Highlights of this legislative session include:

Education

A record \$6.245 billion for public schools in the next biennium “ an 18 percent increase over 2005-07 levels.

Senate Bill 334, Changes Oregon Opportunity Grant to Oregon Shared Responsibility Opportunity Grant. 80 percent increase over last biennium. Award amounts will vary by students needs. Provides funding for ASPIRE program.

Senate Bill 426, will establish pooling of insurance benefits for school employees, resulting in cost savings that will go directly into the classroom.

2007-2009 budget for Oregon's higher education system received an \$87 million increase over essential budget levels

Senate Bill 384, legislation that will limit administrator exit packages when they retire from a school district, an important step in creating more accountability when it comes to administrative costs in education.

Health Care

Senate Bill 3 and Senate Joint Resolution 4, refers the Healthy Kids Plan to voters. The Healthy Kids Plan will provide health care for more than 100,000 children in Oregon that are currently uninsured. The plan achieves this goal by increasing the cigarette tax in Oregon by 84 cents a pack.

Senate Bill 571, Clean-Indoor Air Act, expands the indoor smoking ban to include bingo halls, bars, taverns and restaurants protecting Oregon's workers from unnecessary exposure to harmful secondhand smoke in the workplace.

Senate Bill 362, will allow private businesses and under-insured Oregonians to participate in the drug purchasing pool, creating more purchasing power and lower costs for people using the program.

House Bill 2700, will give women and families greater access to prescription contraceptives through their health insurance plans.

Senate Bill 329, creates the Oregon Health Fund Board, with a direct mandate to develop a plan for an affordable health system to be acted upon by the 2009 legislature.

Environment

Senate Bill 707, legislation that expands the type of containers that can be recycled under the Oregon Bottle Bill to include plastic water containers.

Senate Bill 838, sets a goal of 25 percent renewable energy production by the year 2025 and will make Oregon a leader in working towards a cleaner environment and building a renewable energy industry.

House Bill 2210, a biofuels package that will develop new jobs in Oregon and will help curb dependence on foreign oil

House Bill 2626, establishes a statewide system for collecting and recycling computers, monitors and television at no cost to consumers.

Fiscal Responsibility and Ethics House Bill 2707 and House Bill 2031, legislation that creates the state's first-ever comprehensive rainy day fund.

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Senate Bill 10, legislation that reforms ethics laws for Oregon public officials.

Working Families

House Bill 2255, prevents companies from discriminating against employees for filing wage claims or reporting violations of working conditions, minimum wage, or overtime laws.

House Bill 3086, ensures insurance coverage equity for family members involved in automobile accidents.

House Bill 2891, requires that when a majority of employees sign up for a union, the union will be officially recognized as their representative.

House Bill 3339, provides unemployment benefits to employees that are prevented from working, even when their labor unit is not involved in the dispute

Senate Bill 39, legislation establishing tough new penalties to businesses and individuals that try to use abusive tax shelters to avoid paying taxes.

Senate Bill 400, restores the ability of first responders in the state's public safety jobs to negotiate on safety and staffing issues when bargaining for their contract.

Public Safety

Senate Bill 5533, funding for an additional 100 new Oregon State Police troopers and increased funding for the Criminal Investigations and Forensics divisions

House Bill 3515, creates the crime of online sexual corruption, which is punishable by up to 10 years in prison, a \$250,000 fine and requires those convicted to register as sex offenders in the state.

House Bill 2843, creates crime of "luring" to protect children from online predators.

House Bill 2371, require health and child care facilities to develop emergency plans for the people they serve when there is threat of imminent danger

House Bill 2163, legislation requiring the sale of fire-safe cigarettes in Oregon.

Basic Fairness

Senate Bill 2, legislation that provides protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation.

House Bill 2007, the Family Fairness Act grants legal rights to same-sex couples who register their partnerships with the state. It affords them nearly 500 rights under the law to which they would otherwise not be entitled.

Veterans

House Bill 2026, extends Oregon personal income tax exemption to more members of our national guard.

House Bill 2208, reintegration funding for our returning military personnel.

Senate Bill 822, encourages public employers to provide preference to veterans applying for civil service positions.

Consumer Protection

Senate Bill 583, Sets standards for safeguarding personal information, requires notification to consumers if there is a breach of security, and gives consumers the right to request a security freeze of their credit file.

House Bill 2871, caps the interest rate on state-regulated consumer loans to 36 percent protecting thousands of Oregon citizens from extraordinarily high interest rates that are associated with car title and payday loans.

House Bill 2203, extends consumer protection laws to companies offering loans to Oregon consumers through the mail, the internet or over the telephone

House Bill 2204, limits the interest rate on title loans to 36 percent per annum.

Other Highlights

Senate Concurrent Resolution 1, requires the 74th Legislative Session to adjourn on or before June 29th and declaring intent to hold supplemental session in February of 2008. The 2007 session was the shortest in 12 years.

House Joint Resolution 15, to refer to voters the question of the "double majority" rule.

House Bill 2278, legislation that builds on non-highway transportation efforts around the state to expand connections with rural and urban communities and combat transportation isolation in rural areas.

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