Oregon House Speaker Jeff Merkley to run for US Senate

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Need for 'Fundamental Change' Drives Bid to Unseat Gordon SmithPORTLAND, Ore. -- Citing the need to fundamentally change the direction of the country, Oregon House Speaker Jeff Merkley (D-Portland) filed a statement of candidacy with the Secretary of the Senate today, officially launching his bid for the United States Senate."I'm running for the United States Senate because our nation is profoundly off-track. And unfortunately George Bush and Gordon Smith are leading us further in the wrong direction."Merkley said his campaign will be about creating greater opportunities for every Oregonian. "The Bush-Smith agenda has put working families last. I will put them first," he said. "We need living-wage jobs, affordable health care for every citizen, and smart investments in education, the economy, and national defense."Merkley also said that a top priority will be to bring a responsible end to the war in Iraq. "We need to restore sanity to America's foreign policy and regain the respect and esteem our nation has lost. Sadly, Gordon Smith is unwilling or unable to take a firm stance against the Bush Administration's tragic mistakes.""Unlike Gordon Smith, I have opposed the war in Iraq from the beginning, and as Oregon's United States Senator, I will work every day to bring our sons and daughters home," he said. Merkley emphasized the need to replace the Bush-Smith energy policy of subsidizing oil companies with an energy policy designed to end reliance on foreign oil. "Investing in domestic bio-fuels and alternative energy, and curbing global warming are essential to our national security," he said."Oregon needs a Senator who will stand up for what is right, and not just shift with the political winds," Merkley said. "Gordon Smith has rubber-stamped the Bush agenda for the last six years. Oregonians have had enough."Jeff Merkley is a five-term member of the Oregon House of Representatives. He was elected Speaker of the House in January after Democrats reclaimed control of the Legislature in the 2006 elections. A skilled campaigner, Merkley led House Democrats from a 25-35 deficit to a 31-29 majority in just two election cycles. Observers across the political spectrum have called Oregon's recent legislative session the most productive in over 30 years.As Speaker, he pushed through a plan that protects Oregon families against predatory payday lenders, shepherded a landmark ethics reform, and established a long-sought rainy-day fund to protect public education and critical state services during downturns in the economy. Under Merkley's leadership, the legislature expanded Oregon's bottle bill for the first time in 35 years, guaranteed access to emergency contraception for victims of rape and incest, made major reinvestments in education, and began to rebuild a state police force ravaged by 16 years of budget cuts. Merkley said he will run a grassroots campaign with the participation of thousands of Oregonians. "I've met hundreds of people across the state who feel the same way I do. I look forward to talking with Oregonians about their ideas for a better Oregon and a better America over the next fifteen months."