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OREGON STATE REPRESENTATIVE
NEWS FROM **Pam Marsh**

Dear friends,

Six weeks into the 2017 legislative session, and a few issues are dominating our discussions. I've outlined them below.

While these issues are front and center, we are reviewing many more in committee hearings and on the floor. If you have questions – or opinions! - about anything in the works, please contact my office at Rep.PamMarsh@oregonlegislature.gov, or call 503-986-1405.

Many thanks, my friends.

Best,

Pam Marsh



I was honored to participate in the Citizen's Health Care Town Hall on March 4 at the Medford Library. Photo by Dasja Dolan - <http://www.dasjadolan.com/Events/Political-events>

Revenue

Two weeks ago a revised Revenue forecast predicted that the state will have an additional \$200 million to invest in the next biennium. That's the very good news. The bad news is that our budget is still \$1.6 billion in the hole.

More and more, we are coming to understand that a tax structure that was created in the last century is no longer adequate, appropriate or equitable for 21st century needs.

How we reform our tax system -- and what we choose to fund -- is an enormous conversation that will require input from residents across the state.

For a deeper discussion, see my [recent guest opinion here](#).

Housing

Communities across the state, including the Rogue Valley, are experiencing escalating rents and a huge gap between housing demand and availability. In response, the Legislature is reviewing dozens of bills that address all elements of the crisis.

Legislation under consideration proposes a variety of strategies, including preservation of our current stock of affordable units, expedited project review and approval, funding for housing construction, issuance of tax credits to promote renovation and repair, and changes to landlord-tenant policies.

Not all of these bills will move forward, but it's critical to understand that we will need a comprehensive approach to provide relief to those in our community who are struggling to find and retain homes.

Public Employee Retirement System (PERS)

About \$350 million of the deficit described above is due to increased costs of PERS, the state's retirement system. This has little to do with today's public employees. In 2003, the Legislature overhauled the PERS system. Anyone hired after that date (53% of current employees) is on a retirement program that is self sustaining.

Unfortunately, because of investment and eligibility decisions made several decades ago, PERS has an unfunded liability of about \$21 billion. Those dollars have been promised to retirees, and the courts are clear that there is nothing we can do to minimize that obligation.

However, there may be ways to minimize the costs of future benefits. The Senate Workforce Committee is currently evaluating a long list of such suggestions, carefully weighing each proposal against a list of criterion that includes constitutionality, impact on government, etc. Any proposal that tests well will receive more study.

Unfortunately, I suspect it will be difficult to identify reforms that result in significant relief to our PERS cost burden.

Transportation

Last summer, the Joint Committee on Transportation Preservation traveled across the state to gather public testimony regarding transportation needs – the first step in an effort to develop a statewide transportation package to fund projects with local, regional and statewide significance.

Now the committee is beginning to put together a proposal, including funding ideas, to address road maintenance, congestion, freight, transit, and seismic issues.

It's been eight years since we invested significant dollars into our transportation system. This year's proposal needs to address a backlog of projects, as well as improvements that will sustain our transportation system for years to come.

Clean energy and jobs

Although the issues of revenue and roads tend to capture the headlines, many of us continue to advocate for the development of renewable energy and the jobs associated with that sector. Senate Bill 557 would institute a statewide cap on greenhouse gas emissions, and allow us to invest in local energy production and associated jobs. I am deeply committed to this legislation. However, we need citizens from across the state to speak up on behalf of the climate in order to get meaningful policies approved.

Upcoming events

Constituent Coffee

Friday, March 31, 2017, 2:00pm to 4:00pm
Downtown Coffee House, 200 Talent Ave, Talent

Please join me for a coffee at Downtown Coffee House next Friday. I'll be there from 2:00 to 4:00 to discuss issues in front of the legislature.

[RSVP here](#)

Happy Hour

Friday, March 31, 2017, 5:00pm to 6:00pm
South Stage Cellars, 125 S 3rd St, Jacksonville

Join me for a glass of wine and we can have a group discussion about the challenges in front of our state.

[RSVP here](#)

Town Hall

Saturday, April 8, 2017, 10:30am
Rogue Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, 87 4th St, Ashland

Senator DeBoer and I will answer your questions and discuss various issues.



Hundreds of people attended the Ways and Means public hearing at Southern Oregon University on February 24, 2017 to talk about the services they rely on that are at risk of cuts or elimination given the current budget deficit. I spoke on the House floor about the hearing and the issue at the core of this situation -- a fundamental need to address Oregon's outdated, unreliable and insufficient tax structure.

Legislative Updates

House Bill 2990 - Manufactured Home Parks. Manufactured home parks provide valuable and often affordable housing to residents throughout our region. HB 2990 gives tenants, or a nonprofit acting on their behalf, first right of refusal to buy a park when it is going to be sold. [Learn more about HB 2990 here.](#)

Senate Bills 928 and 929 - Protecting Pollinators. Neonicotinoids, or neonics, are common and readily available pesticides that are devastating to our bee population and are often misused. SB 928 addresses the problem by requiring that products containing neonicotinoids be clearly labeled. SB 929 requires the Department of Agriculture to classify neonicotinoids as restricted use pesticides. Learn more about [HB 928 here](#) or [HB 929 here.](#)

House Bill 2005 - Pay Equity. There is a tragic history in our country of paying women and minorities less for the same work as other employees. This bill prevents wage discrimination based on an employee's status as a member of a protected class. [Learn more here.](#)

House Bill 2401 - School Based Health Centers. School-based health centers are an important point of access to health care for our students, especially those who come from households that struggle with the time or cost of obtaining healthcare. This bill provides funding for school-based health centers and student access to mental health care. [Learn more here.](#)

House Bill 2577 - Transparency in Lobbying. Professional lobbyists are often the most experienced and highest paid people working in our Capitol. This bill requires lobbyists to file a statement with the Oregon Government Ethics Commission to identify each bill or measure that they lobby for or against, and what individuals or groups are paying for their work. HB 2577 also makes this gathered information available to the public. [Learn more here.](#)

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