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End of Session Wrap up

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OREGON STATE REPRESENTATIVE
NEWS FROM **Pam Marsh**

July 21, 2017

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

On Friday, July 7, the gavel came down one last time to signal the end of Oregon's 2017 legislative session. It was the final moment of a packed, productive, sometimes disappointing and occasionally contentious five months in the Capitol.

My heartfelt thanks to all of you who called, emailed or wrote to provide input on the array of issues considered by the Legislature. Your concerns, suggestions and feedback continue to be inspirational.

I am honored to serve as your state representative. I look forward to working with you in the months ahead on our shared efforts to build a healthy and resilient state.

Best,

State Representative
Oregon House District 5 - Southern Jackson County



Rep Marsh at the SB 3 (Suction Dredge) bill signing ceremony w/ Governor Brown, other legislators & advocates

2017 Legislative Scorecard: Wins, and an ongoing to-do list

Vital funding for health care, strong support for reproductive equity, a line-up of transportation fixes, disappointments on revenue reform and revitalization of public education, climate change legislation still to come: that's a quick summary of the Oregon Legislature's 2017 report.

From the first day of the session, much of our discussion, sometimes heated, centered around our perceptions of the differing needs between rural and urban areas of the state.

Here in Jackson County we sit somewhere in the middle of that polarity. While most of us live in the urban core, our county includes significant rural pockets. Our traditional reliance on the timber economy aligns us with other resource-dependent areas of the state, but we have developed a much more robust economy than many rural communities.

Clearly, the rural parts of the state face economic challenges, including population loss, changing weather patterns, and the need for diversification, that require specific kinds of investment.

But when we look at the needs of families and communities, the rural vs. urban construct crumbles. Every Oregonian, rural or urban, needs health care, a family-wage job, good schools, and a sense of connection. Drawing artificial lines that force us to choose one side or another is a much less effective strategy than recognizing our shared values.

Unfortunately, for now those lines exist and they are difficult to breach. In the end, our work this session produced some solid policy gains for families and communities. In other areas, our efforts fell short.

Let's start with the very good news:

Health Care

When the legislature convened in February, we were facing a \$900 million deficit in the state's health care budget, threatening coverage for one million children and adults served by the Oregon Health Plan. Thanks to a bipartisan effort that incorporated cost cutting and a provider tax on hospitals and insurance companies, we will preserve services for all who qualify – including roughly 50,000 Jackson County residents.

We also approved funding to ensure that all children have access to health care, regardless of citizenship status. Taking care of kids is the right thing to do. It is also far more cost effective to provide care than to have a child show up at kindergarten with chicken pox.

The final piece of the health care work focused on ensuring cost-free access to reproductive health care for women, regardless of citizenship status, ability to pay, or gender identity. For more information about this legislation, see the article linked [HERE](#).

Transportation

In the waning days of the session the legislature approved a 10-year, \$5.3 billion transportation package. The package utilizes multiple revenue sources to fund road and highway infrastructure, seismic upgrades, multi-modal projects, bike and pedestrian paths, and transit. A substantial chunk of new revenue will go to cities and counties for local projects; the balance will be allocated to projects of statewide significance.

Rogue Valley Transit District will receive a game-changing allocation of approximately \$4.5 million/year from payroll tax proceeds; the region will also get funding for seismic upgrades to ensure that traffic can move in and out of the valley in the event of a major earthquake.



Rural Economic Development

Recognizing the need to boost our rural areas, the Legislature invested \$5 million in a new Eastern Oregon Border Economic Development Region. We also extended tax incentives for rural medical providers, increased flexibility for rural enterprise zones, and approved specific targeted investments, including a tax credit to encourage employee training programs in Klamath Falls.

Justice System Reforms

Renewed justice reinvestment funding will maintain and expand the state's community-based alternative sentencing programs. Additional reforms will implement sentencing flexibility for certain nonviolent crimes to allow offenders, often women and frequently struggling with addiction or generational dysfunction, to maintain critical family connections while undergoing treatment.

Local diversion programs are much more cost effective than incarceration and may allow the state to avoid opening a new, very expensive women's prison.

- [HB 2355](#) - Racial Profiling Date & Drug Sentencing Reform
- [HB 3078](#) - 2017 Safety & Savings Act
- [SB 505](#) - Grand Jury Recordings

Pay Equity

Equal work should always produce equal pay. With the passage of [House Bill 2005](#), the legislature planted a clear flag, outlawing pay disparities based on gender, race, color, religion, and other protected classes.

Housing Supply

Lack of affordable, available housing is a significant problem in communities across Oregon. In response, the legislature allocated funding to prevent and address homelessness; increased investments to preserve and develop our housing supply; and strengthened protections for manufactured park residents. We will continue work on unfinished housing issues in 2018. You can find a summary of this year's legislative work [HERE](#).

Then there were the disappointments:

Revenue

Despite months of discussion and negotiation, we fell a one vote short of the supermajority required for a package that would have included fundamental tax reform, cost containment and greater investments in education and critical services. But problems with our underlying revenue structure are not going away. Projections for the corporate income tax show flat revenues in the coming biennia, and our over-reliance on income tax produces instability in our tax system. The tax reform debate must return – soon.

Education

A difficult budget year meant that we were unable to accelerate investment in our education (cradle to university) system. Instead, we scrabbled together an education budget that is about \$200 million short of current service level. Most K-12 schools will be able to hold mostly steady, although others, including those with declining enrollment, will see significant cuts.

We also invested \$170 million in career technical education programs and high school graduation initiatives, a result of the passage of Measure 98. Support for STEM programming is important, but I believe most voters thought that Measure 98 money would supplement, not supplant, local school budgets. Given the shortfall in our K-12 budget, I would have preferred to direct this allocation to general school support, allowing local districts to decide how to best invest it.

In the early childhood arena, we maintained funding for full-day kindergarten, Head Start, Preschool Promise, and other critical programs. Unfortunately, funding for Employment-Related Day Care, which provides child care subsidies for working families, fell short. A \$11.7 million cut in the program will eliminate slots that would have served 1,100 families.

We also struggled to invest in higher education. A last-minute budget allocation allowed Southern Oregon University to reduce its projected tuition increase for next

year from 12% to 9%. Still, none of us would consider a 9% increase good news. Adequate support for Oregon's higher universities remains on our to-do list.

Environment

Thanks to decisive action by Governor Kate Brown, and with approval of \$100 million in bonding, the 82,500 acre Elliott Forest will remain in public ownership. Unfortunately, other key environmental priorities, including clean air and climate initiatives, fell short.

But the effects of destabilized weather patterns become more obvious every day. Clean energy jobs legislation ([cap and invest](#)) must top our list of action items in 2018.



Remembering Alan Bates

I was honored to carry Senate Concurrent Resolution 7, honoring the late Senator Alan Bates, on the floor of the House. Doc Bates will forever remain in our thoughts and in our hearts.

Need Help Finding Help? Dial 2-1-1 !

Oregon provides a wide range of services to help citizens with everything from foreclosure to health care, but sometimes it's hard to find what you need. [211info](#) is the resource center for anything from SNAP (food stamps) to mortgage counseling. The center is here to connect you to the resources you need! Please click [here](#) to find the Community Resource Directory.

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