

Myers takes over as state attorney general

■ **OFFICE:** The former state legislator plans to focus on keeping kids out of trouble

By Charles E. Beggs
The Associated Press

Former Oregon House Speaker Hardy Myers became Oregon's 15th attorney general on Monday, and three other state officials were sworn in to begin terms.

Myers was sworn in by Chief Justice Wallace Carson Jr. of the Oregon Supreme Court in a ceremony attended by about 300 peo-

ple in the Oregon House chamber. The attorney general is the chief lawyer for state government. Myers, a Democrat who has practiced law in Portland, was elected to the post in November.

Ted Kulongoski, also a Democrat, gave up the attorney general's office in a successful run for an Oregon Supreme Court seat. Kulongoski also was sworn in Monday, in a ceremony at the court.

Later, Carson gave the oaths of office to Secretary of State Phil Keisling and State Treasurer Jim Hill.

They are Democrats who were re-elected to the positions in November. Those offices by law are limited to two terms.

Myers was a state representative from 1975 to 1985 and served as House speaker from 1979 to 1983.

He told the audience following his swearing-in that he intends to make child welfare a top priority.

Myers said he wants the attorney general to play a central role to prevent children from starting down the road to crime.

"The stakes involved in that effort are no less than the survival of

our society," he said.

Myers said the biggest immediate issue facing him is interpreting and gauging the effects of a property tax cut measure passed by voters at the November general election.

Myers voted against the initiative, but after the election he said he would put his personal feelings aside in defending the new law against any lawsuits.

"We're going to need to be careful to give sound legal advice as to what the measure means and how to comply with it," he said.

Replacing tanks could mean empty future for small gas stations

■ **CLEANUP:** Rural stations often cannot afford the high cost of removing aging gas storage containers

By Charles E. Beggs
The Associated Press

SALEM — As numerous Oregon gas stations face extinction because of a tank cleanup deadline, the 1997 Legislature might be asked for last-ditch financial help.

Otherwise, says a gas dealers' spokesman, Oregon could lose as many as half of its 1,800 service stations within about two years.

The threatened stations are in rural areas, smaller outlets that cannot afford big tank repair and replacement costs, says Mike Sherlock, executive director of the Oregon Gasoline Dealers Association.

A U.S. Environmental Protec-

tion Agency order adopted in 1988 says tanks in use before 1988 must be renovated or replaced to minimize chances of leaking fuel contaminating ground water.

The deadline for compliance is Dec. 22, 1998, and not much government financial assistance is in sight for station owners.

"We expect tanks to be the subject of discussion in the legislative session," says Mike Kortenof, manager of the underground tanks program for the state Department of Environmental Quality.

"We expect a lot of requests for help," Kortenof says. But the agency did not ask for lottery funds this year.

About \$6 million in lottery revenue has helped about 80 stations with grants to fund tank replacement costs since 1993.

But lottery revenue is no longer rising, so the DEQ did not seek any

funding from that source.

A lot of people are just hanging on and praying some miracle will happen that will bail them out before the deadline, Sherlock said.

He says many Oregonians likely are not aware of the problem and will not be until the last stations start closing down.

Major oil companies have upgraded tanks at the high-volume stations in major cities. But the \$100,000 or more for that work is hard to justify for some rural station operators, Sherlock says.

There is talk of extending the deadline, he says, a move the association would oppose.

"A lot of people have put their life savings to update fuel tanks," he says. "It would be very unfair. The die is cast. People have had ample warning."

"[The] EPA is making clear there won't be an extension," says

Kortenof.

He says the DEQ is asking for a major increase in the permit fee for tanks, now \$35 a year.

The agency wants it increased to \$60, to raise \$339,000 to finance an expected increase in technical assistance requested by tank owners as the deadline draws nearer.

Some sort of fee increase is needed just to stay even in revenue, because the number of tank permits is dropping as stations close up rather than meet the expensive requirements.

Two efforts to help finance a large-scale tank cleanup program with public funds failed.

Lawmakers passed a measure to finance a program by imposing a new fee on gas deliveries to stations. But the courts threw out the plan, saying the fee amounted to a gas tax that the state constitution allows to be used only for highways.


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