

# Mirth, affection, silliness punctuate Oregon Legislature's last days

DIANE DIETZ  
STATESMAN JOURNAL

The state pie is Marionberry.  
Oregon's official state tartan is a green, yellow and purple plaid.  
The western meadowlark is the official state songbird.  
The osprey is the official state raptor.  
August is Oregon Albacore Tuna Month.

Making all those things so in the waning days of the 79th Legislature inspired rare displays of affection, mirth and accord among lawmakers.

Last April, for instance, when the Senate adopted a bill that overthrew the western meadowlark in favor of the taloned osprey as the Oregon bird, a fight among Senate bird lovers was brewing.

Sen. Fred Girod, a fisherman and Republican senator from Stayton, introduced the bill. He said meadowlarks are too small — scarcely bigger than a robin — and not much to see, if they're even around, which is seldom.

Defenders of the meadowlark cited its gentle nature and mellifluous song. "(We) drive a dagger through the soft downy breast of this feathered harbinger of spring," Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, said back in April.

But in July, after a bruising session, lawmakers were finding some common ground in their duty of naming the state's official this and that. The day before the close of session, the Senate Rules Committee cracked itself up figuring who would carry the bills from the committee to the floor.

"Sen. Ferrioli, would you rather carry this one or the tartan one?" Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick asked.

"Neither, Madam Chair," Senate Republican Leader Ted Ferrioli said, chuckling.

"Sen. Riley would love to carry the Tartan bill; we do know that," Sen. Arnie Roblan, D-Coos Bay said.

"You get Marrionberries," a committee member told Ferrioli.

"This is really a Marion County thing. It really ought to be Sen. Courtney who carries it," a committee member said.

"How much do we value our lives?" Burdick said laughing and adding "Sen. Boquist is actually the closest member."

"Sen. Courtney should carry it, and the sweet co-carrier would be a Republican from Marion County," Roblan said.

"You know, I think I'll ask Sen. Winters to carry that," Burdick said.

The bipartisan committee put its heads together on a bill to designate August 2017 the Albacore Tuna Month.

But there was a problem. Without an emergency clause, the bill would take effect long after August. Roblan propose a solution: take the numerals 2-0-1-7 out of the bill. And the committee did.

"Madam chair, who is going to carry the albatross bill?" Ferrioli said.

"That would have to be the state seabird," someone interjected.

"Sen. Roblan will carry this bill and he will also deal with any fallout that occurs because of this bill."

"With that happy note, we are adjourned," Burdick said.



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As their session came to a close, legislators were able to agree on making Marionberry the state pie — but debate raged about where you can get the tastiest one.

In both chambers the bills, the naming bills won wide support and a lot of good-natured ribbing.

In the House, Rep. DB Smith, R-Port Orford, pointed out the majesty of the amended tuna bill. "Now," he said, "every August in perpetuity will be albacore tuna month."

The House passed the bill 58-to-0.

Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem, commended Marionberry pie to her colleagues in the Senate on Friday.

"The berry gets its name from Marion County, which is home to our state Capitol. Ninety percent of the world's marionberries are grown in Marion County," she said.

But Douglas County-based Sen. Jeff Kruse, a fellow Republican, said out of an abundance of caution he had to declare a potential conflict. "My bakery makes absolutely the best Marionberry pies on the planet," he said.

Lawmakers resolved the state bird question with an elegant piece of statesmanship, naming the meadowlark the state songbird and the osprey the state raptor.

According to the final bill House Majority Leader Jennifer Williamson read from the floor:

"Whereas many Oregonians feel that it is time to adopt the osprey as our state bird, valuing the raptor as a fitting symbol of Oregon's rugged independence, strength and resilience; and

"Whereas other Oregonians favor the western meadowlark, already our unofficial state bird, considering the songbird's peaceful, mellifluous song to be an emblem of gentle beauty and culture within this state; and

"Whereas the question of whether the state bird should be a raptor or a songbird presents a false dichotomy; and Whereas sometimes the best answer to

an "either-or" question is "and" ...

"Whereas embracing the excellent qualities of one bird does not derogate those of the other; and Whereas while most states are content to be limited to one state bird, Oregon recognizes the need for another, understanding that there is room in the hearts of Oregonians for two symbolic birds."

But the House couldn't quite leave it at that.

Eugene-area Rep. Julie Fahey sketched the outlines of a battle for another day by describing this "fundamental injustice":

"The Oregon state animal is the beaver, and yet nowhere in our pantheon of state symbols does the duck appear. So vote your conscience on this one, colleagues, but I wonder if we might see a resolution in a future session to name a state waterfowl."

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