

Governor focuses on education, campaign finance reform

By Andrew Selsky
The Associated Press

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown unveiled a \$23.6 billion budget proposal for the next biennium on Wednesday, saying she wants to push education funding, campaign finance reform, ensure continued access to health insurance coverage and fund legal counseling for immigrants facing deportation.

Besides \$2 million for that legal counseling, Brown is dedicating another \$2 million in funding for legal action against the Trump administration and to prevent retaliation for the state's more liberal policies. Brown told a news conference Wednesday that Oregon is involved in 15 lawsuits against the current administration.

"Oregon must work independently and with other states to navigate our relationship with the federal government when protecting the values Oregonians hold," Brown said.

The Governor added a \$2 billion education investment package that's in addition to her base budget. Property tax limitations adopted in the early 1990s have resulted in decreased funding per student, her proposal noted, adding that the governor expects the Legislature "to reform Oregon's revenue system to adequately fund our education system."

That means taxes. In the Nov. 6 elections, Democrats gained greater power to impose taxes without Republican support when they won a three-fifths supermajority in the Legislature. Democrats say they aim to pass a multibillion-dollar revenue measure in the 2019 legislative session, which starts in January and runs to early July, to fund public education.

Senate President Peter Courtney said in a recent interview it could be a value added tax or a gross receipts tax, but not a sales tax.

House Republican Leader Representative Carl Wilson called Brown's budget proposal "a call to drastically increase taxes on everyday Oregonians."

"Oregonians should be worried that this year, the governor proposes and the Legislature imposes massive tax increases on them," said Wilson, who's from Grants Pass and was selected Monday to be the House Republican leader.

The governor also proposed the creation of a new agency to align Oregon's climate and energy policies while ending operations of the Carbon Policy Office and the Oregon Department of Energy. The new Oregon Climate Authority would be responsible for implementing the state's climate strategies and track-

ing progress toward climate goals, including a new carbon marketplace and greenhouse gas emissions reporting.

With wildfires getting more severe, Brown said in her budget proposal and policy agenda that she will sign an executive order to establish the Governor's Council on Wildfire Response with the task of evaluating Oregon's current system for responding to large fires, and whether it should be changed. The council must make recommendations next September.

Senate Republican Leader Jackie Winters said she was pleased to see the creation of the wildfire council, but criticized a proposed 22 percent decrease to the fire protection budget.

"But, most concerning of all are the increased taxes peppered throughout the budget," Winters said.

And with scientists saying a huge earthquake along the Cascadia subduction zone will happen sooner or later, the budget dedicates \$12 million to implement a statewide earthquake early warning system by 2023. It also funds a study of vertical evacuation options for schools and hospitals in the tsunami inundation zones. A Cascadia quake is expected to cause a tsunami that will hit low-lying coastal areas, many of them populated.

On the heels of a gubernatorial race that generated the biggest war chests for Brown and her Republican rival Knute Buehler, Brown said she'll refer a constitutional amendment to the ballot to impose campaign finance limitations in Oregon elections. She also wants lawmakers to pass legislation to allow Oregonians to follow the money in real time for candidates and ballot measures, saying the technology already allows reporting of campaign transactions almost immediately.

She also aims to expand Oregon's pioneering motor voter program, in which those doing business at the motor vehicles department are automatically registered to vote.

"Any state agency interaction should allow eligible voters to easily register," Brown said in her proposal, whether it is signing up for classes or getting a fishing license.

The Democratic governor also wants to make it easier for Oregonians to vote by mail, by not requiring a postage stamp.

Secretary of State Dennis Richardson, a Republican who is the state's top elections official, said on Twitter that he has already recommended the move.

"This will help our military members, people experiencing disabilities, and those who live far from ballot dropboxes," Richardson tweeted.

which would open up more areas for housing development.

Boquist told The Observer he will take the comments made at the meeting and file them for future use.

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MCCLURE

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heart of the democratic process. He unwaveringly believes that for democracy to work the voices representing all sides must be heard. This is why McClure begins many of his work days by taking a road less traveled. He checks his phone messages and determines which one he will return first. His criteria makes the decision easy.

"I pick the phone call that will be the most challenging — that is my rule," McClure said.

The commissioner explained he knows after doing this there is a good chance the toughest part of his day is out of the way. He also knows that in many instances it means he has been unwavering in his effort to ensure all sides of an issue are heard.

"What democracy is about is the opportunity for citizens to address elected officials," McClure said.

John Lamoreau, who served on the Union County Board of Commissioners for one term a little more than a decade ago, has long been impressed with McClure's dedication to the democratic process.

"He always treats people with respect and will often praise both sides. Steve knows how to bring parties together. He would make a great ambassador," Lamoreau said.

Colleen MacLeod, who served as a Union County Commissioner with McClure from 1997 to 2009, echoes this sentiment.

"When someone has so much experience, he can find middle ground. He knows what will work and will not work," MacLeod said.

She added McClure's calm, friendly demeanor serves him well and he is adept at helping members of the Board of Commissioners get along.

"I never heard him raise his voice," MacLeod said. "He is a fun person to work with."

People who work with McClure are sometimes startled by his breadth of knowledge on local issues.

"I sometimes think he has a photographic memory," said Donna Beverage,

one of the three current Union County Commissioners.

She said his knowledge of forest issues is particularly impressive. Case in point: McClure's understanding of the Blue Mountain Forest Plan, now being developed by the federal government for the management of forests in this region.

"All of the county commissioners in Oregon depend on Steve for information about it," Beverage said.

McClure's knowledge base is a credit to his experience and his work ethic.

"He reads everything cover to cover," Beverage said.

MacLeod agreed McClure's knowledge is impressive. She noted, for example, when transportation issues come up, McClure is looked upon by many as the primary source of background information.

"We will lose a huge chunk of history (when McClure steps down)," MacLeod said.

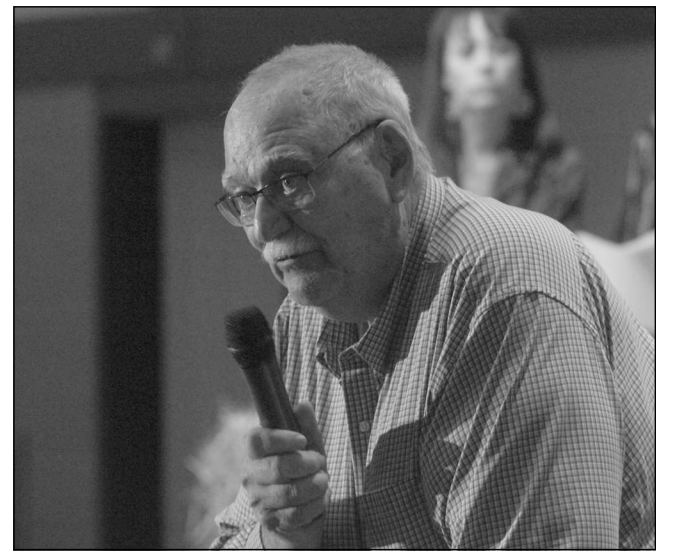
McClure first entered politics in the early 1980s when he was elected to the Elgin School Board. He won re-election four years later and served as the board's chair for a portion of his tenure. Serving on a school board is an excellent way to get introduced to politics, the commissioner said. McClure noted being involved in decisions like whether a student should be suspended was a valuable learning experience.

"Getting between a parent and a child (who may be disciplined) is very intense. You learn about politics up close," McClure said.

With his school board experience under his belt, McClure first ran for a position on the Union County Board of Commissioners in 1988. He lost in the general election to retired La Grande High School teacher and football coach Doc Savage by just 48 votes. McClure said that the defeat stung after months of hard work.

"I must have knocked on 7,000 doors (during the campaign). Picking up my campaign signs the next day, that was a long day," he said.

Still, McClure did not give up in his effort to join



Observer file photo

Commissioner Steve McClure was awarded the Distinguished Service to Agriculture at the November Union County Farmer Merchant banquet

the Board of Commissioners.

"I felt I had something to contribute," he said.

Two years later, McClure was appointed to fill the five month unexpired term of Marie Lester after she retired as a Union County Commissioner. In November 1990, he won the election for a four-year term, the first of seven elections he would win.

McClure joined the Union County Board of Commissioners at a difficult time — the same year Oregon voters passed Ballot Measure 5. The measure drastically cut property taxes, leaving many public entities, including Union County, facing budget shortfalls.

"It had a major impact on Union County's revenue," McClure said of Measure 5. "We had to cut about \$600,000 from our 1991-92 budget. It was an intense time."

McClure never let himself forget just how difficult the process was.

"That shaped my view of government," he said. "Fiscally, it taught me a lot."

McClure said from then on he made sure whenever the county received any extra money, it was used for one-time capital expenditures like building repairs, not for the creation of new programs.

"If we had a few extra dollars, I didn't want to spend it on starting a program we could not sustain," he said.

Budget challenges notwithstanding, Union County has made noteworthy strides during McClure's tenure. These in-

clude rebuilding McAlister Road and Buchanan Lane in Island City and La Grande, major renovations on South 12th Street in La Grande, replacing many old steel bridges with concrete ones, establishing the Mount Emily Recreation Area, major improvements at the La Grande/Union County Airport, and building a U.S. Forest Service rappel base for firefighting at that airport, which will be completed in 2019.

The Board of Commissioners played a major role in all of these projects, but McClure stressed that the county received significant assistance from other agencies and individuals.

McClure's contributions to the county's successes have not gone unnoticed. He was named Union County's Man of the Year in 2014 by the Union County Chamber of Commerce. McClure also received an honor of note earlier this month when he was chosen as the recipient of the 2018 Distinguished Service to Agriculture Award at the Union County Farmer-Merchant Banquet.

The awards reflect the respect and admiration the community has for McClure and his compassionate nature.

"He has a huge heart," MacLeod said.

McClure said after he retires he and his wife, Barbara, plan to spend more time with their son and daughter — Michael of Lacy, Washington, and Jennifer of Weston — and their grandchildren.

OHCS

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securing more affordable rental housing and finding ways to help those who can afford to buy a home.

Connor McDonnell, housing integrator for OHCS, said one of the goals for the state department is to triple "the existing pipeline of affordable rental housing of up to 25,000 homes" across the state by 2023.

Dale Inslee, of the Northeast Oregon Housing Authority, told the representatives that it's important not to forget about offsetting the far-reaching effects of

this expansion.

If the state brings in more housing, then that means more people are potentially coming to the area, which means more work for law enforcement, the fire department and more students in school. Offering additional money to, for instance, add one more police officer or firefighter could make a big difference to a municipality, he said.

Kim Travis, another housing integrator, responded by saying OHCS does not have control over all the pieces but it can work with other agencies and resources to make suggestions like that

one to see if they can work it out.

Another goal of the statewide plan is to provide more rental housing for low and moderate income workers. Many of them can afford to own a home but no homes are available in their price range and therefore they continue to rent — taking up a rental that could otherwise be used for someone with a smaller income. With this in mind, OHCS has a goal to help at

least 6,500 households become homeowners by 2023.

OHCS is conducting a survey online for anyone who wishes to participate in fine-tuning the statewide plan and give their opinion about the housing situation in Oregon. Go to www.oregon.gov/ohcs/pages/oshp.aspx and click on the link to the survey toward the bottom of the page. All surveys must be completed by Dec. 18.

RENT

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the dorms is so much higher than renting, most upper-classmen choose to live off campus.

One of the suggestions made at the meeting was lowering the cost of the dorms to entice students to continue to live on campus after their first year so there would be more apartments available to non-students.

Another suggestion was made to change some of the zoning in La Grande to allow multi-family dwellings,



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