

Gun safety regulations on ballot could cost local governments

State committee released financial evaluations for four measures Oregonians will vote on in November

By ALEX BAUMHARDT
Oregon Capital Chronicle

SALEM — Only one of the four statewide ballot measures Oregonians will vote on in November comes at a financial cost to local governments.

That measure would ban the sale of high-capacity ammunition magazines, require a firearm safety course, tighten licensing and create stricter background checks on weapons purchases. A committee involving the Secretary of State's Office and legislative analysts determined it would cost the state over \$23 million but generate about the same amount in revenue. The measure would cost local governments up to \$31 million in its first year.

Three other statewide ballot measures — that would punish absentee lawmakers, strip mention of slavery from the Constitution and make health care a constitutional right — have little or no impact on state finances, analysts determined.

State officials will consider changes to the financial impact statements and any changes will be made before Aug. 10, according to Ben Morris, communications director for the Secretary of State's Office.

The Financial Estimate Committee, a partnership of the Legislative Policy and Research Office and the Oregon Secretary of State's Office, will host the meeting. The committee is tasked with evaluating the costs of ballot measures before including them in voter pamphlets and on ballots.

Its five members are Secretary of State Shemia Fagan, state Treasurer Tobias Read, Revenue Department Director Betsy Imholt, Administrative Services



Semiautomatic rifles are displayed on a wall at a gun shop in Lynnwood, Washington, on Oct. 2, 2018. A measure that would ban the sale of high-capacity ammunition magazines, require a firearm safety course, tighten licensing and create stricter background checks on weapons purchases could come with a high financial cost to local governments, according to a committee involving the Secretary of State's Office and legislative analysts.

Director Katy Coba and a local government representative, currently accountant Tim Collier.

Boosting gun safety

More than 160,000 Oregonians signed a petition to get a new gun control proposal on the November ballot. Initiative Petition 17 would require anyone buying a firearm to obtain a permit by passing a safety training course. Current gun owners would have to obtain permits for any future gun purchases if the law were enacted. It would also ban the sale of ammunition magazines containing more than 10 rounds and require background checks on everyone who buys a gun, no matter the wait. Current state and federal gun laws require criminal background checks, but a loophole in federal law allows gun dealers to sell firearms without a completed background check if it takes longer than three days to complete.

The measure would require

expenditures but would also bring in money.

Cost to state government:

- About \$2 million in one-time expenses and \$21 million between 2023-25 to provide additional staff and resources for the Oregon State Police for background checks and issuing permits. The Oregon Judicial Department would likely have increased costs and cases related to new crimes established by the law and among people appealing permit denials.

Revenue for state government:

- Up to \$23.5 million for the state from fees for fingerprinting, FBI background checks and judicial filings.

Cost to local government:

- More than \$51 million in the first year to process an estimated 300,000 permit applications a year.

- More than \$47 million in subsequent years to process permits.

Revenue for local

government:

- Nearly \$20 million per year in application fees.

Punishing absentee lawmakers

Initiative Petition 14 would amend the state Constitution to make lawmakers ineligible for reelection if they have 10 or more unexcused absences from floor sessions. Such sessions involve debates and voting on new laws. The measure aims to stop Republican lawmakers from blocking legislation by walking out or refusing to show up.

Republican lawmakers did that five times in 2019 and 2020 to prevent or stall action on guns, forestry, health care, the education budget and climate change. Oregon's Constitution requires that two-thirds of legislators be present for a vote. This means that if more than 20 representatives or more than 10 senators are absent, a vote cannot take place.

The initiative is not expected to cost state or local governments anything and would not generate any revenue, according to the committee.

Removing slavery as punishment for crime

Initiative Referendum 402 would remove slavery and indentured servitude as accepted criminal punishments in the Oregon Constitution. Currently, Oregon is one of 10 states that technically still allows such punishment in sentencing. It would add language to the Constitution allowing state courts and probation and parole officials to order alternatives to incarceration such as education and treatment, too. A grassroots advocacy group, Oregonians Against Slavery & Involuntary Servitude, which was established in 2020 by alumni of Willamette University, is behind the initiative.

The committee determined that any costs are tentative. "The impact of the measure will depend on potential legal action or changes to inmate work programs," the committee concluded.

Health care as a constitutional right

Initiative Referendum 401 would amend the state Constitution to make access to affordable health care a right and make Oregon the first state in the nation to secure such a right for its residents.

It would require the state to ensure access to "cost-effective, clinically appropriate and affordable health care" for residents, balanced against obligations to fund public schools and other essential public services, according to the petition.

The committee could not determine the financial impacts of the measure because amending the Constitution would not cost extra money, but laws created to ensure the new right would.

"The impact of the measure will depend on future legislative action to establish additional health benefits and determine how they will be paid for," it wrote.

Less than 100 days remain until November election

By GARY A. WARNER
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — It's easy to feel like the November election is a long way off.

Primary election ballots were still being counted just 10 weeks ago.

It's been just a month since the Fourth of July.

One of the main "candidates" for governor hasn't qualified to run and likely won't hit that mark until the end of August.

Summer, the old and increasingly irrelevant conventional wisdom says, is a time of political doldrums. Labor Day, the traditional kickoff of the general election campaign, is still a month away.

But political tradition hasn't held up in recent election cycles and has been largely kicked to the curb in 2022. There will be a new governor, at least three new members of Congress, and a host of new legislators representing new districts. Also on the ballot are measures on gun control and barring recalcitrant lawmakers from running for office if they walk off the job too often.

One look at the calendar shows the climax of the 2022 election is rapidly approaching. As of Sunday, July 31, there were 100 days until the Nov. 8 general election.

The primary culled and cleared the political field.

The May 17 ballot featured 376 candidates: 146 Republicans, 134 Democrats and 96 running for officially nonpartisan offices.

The effect of voting was dramatic.

May 17 began with 34 candidates for governor, 16 for the new 6th Congressional District, 10 for U.S. senator, and seven for the Bureau of Labor and Industries commissioner.

When the final votes were tallied over a week later, each race had two finalists.

The primary notched its first major casualty of 2022 when U.S. Rep. Kurt



Jaime Valdez/Pamplin Media

Republican nominee Christine Drazan, left, and unaffiliated candidate Betsy Johnson, right, listen to Democratic nominee Tina Kotek speak during a governor candidates' debate hosted by Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association at Mount Hood Oregon Resort on Friday, July 29, 2022, in Welches.

Schrader, D-Canby, was upset by progressive Terbonne attorney Jamie McLeod-Skinner in his bid for an eighth term representing the 5th Congressional District.

The outcome of the May 17 vote also put two bitter rivals from the House on a collision course in the race for governor.

With Gov. Kate Brown barred from running again due to term limits, Democrats chose former House Speaker Tina Kotek of Portland as their nominee. Former House Leader Christine Drazan topped the GOP primary field.

Kotek and Drazan had both resigned from the House early to run for governor. Along with inflation, COVID-19, abortion, guns, housing, and homeless policies, their campaigns would be framed by a personal animosity born from a 2021 fight over a broken bargain on political redistricting.

"She lied and broke her promise not just to us but to Oregonians," Drazan said on Sept. 21. "She just sold the soul of our state for Democrats' political gain."

In most years, that would be enough drama by itself. But last week the first major debate of the governor's race was held at a newspaper publishers' convention in Clackamas County. Sharing the stage with Kotek and Drazan was a third candidate for governor who has raised the

largest campaign war chest, but hasn't appeared on a ballot or even qualified to run for the office.

Former Sen. Betsy Johnson, D-Scappoose, dropped out of the Senate and the Democratic Party in a bid to become just the second governor since Oregon became a state in 1859 to win

the governorship without a major party affiliation. It was last done by department store heir Julius Meier in 1930. The GOP nomination for governor had been won by Meier's friend, the reform Republican George Joseph. When Joseph suddenly died prior to the election, Oregon Republican bosses chose conservative Phil Metschan, the state GOP chair, to take his place on the ballot.

Meier entered the race as an independent, drawing aggressive attacks from The Oregonian newspaper. Meier countered that the only thing of significance in the paper was the ads for his Meier & Frank store. He won easily and served one term.

Johnson has Meier's penchant for a quip, though her political history is much more bifurcated.

Born in Bend and raised in Redmond, she was the

daughter of timberman and philanthropist Sam Johnson, who served as a Republican in the Legislature and as mayor of Redmond.

His daughter moved to his left, both on the map and on the political spectrum. She made her name in the aviation business on the Oregon Coast and her own long career in Salem as a Democrat in the Legislature, first on the southern coast and later in the Columbia County area.

Johnson is seeking to cast herself as the middle lane between a far-left Kotek and a far-right Drazan.

"I am pro-choice," Johnson wrote on Twitter earlier this year. "This is a bedrock issue for me, and frankly, for Oregon."

Last week, she said Drazan, the only anti-abortion candidate among the trio, would veto "pro-choice policies."

Kotek would push liberal social agendas and increase government spending and taxes, Johnson asserts.

"She'd have us all woke and broke," Johnson said.

Kotek has countered that Johnson and Drazan have spent much of their political careers emphasizing what they were against, while she had done the difficult work of moving bills through the Legislature.

"Being able to deliver results right now is what really matters for Oregonians," Kotek said.

On a practical level, Johnson has until Aug. 16 to submit 23,744 valid signatures to the Secretary of State's Office in order to secure her place on the Nov. 8 ballot. Her official campaign committee name, "Run, Betsy, Run," reflects the need to first get to the starting line. Only then can she try to be first across the finish line.

Attention Union County 4th-12th graders!



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