

Opinion / Politics

SoS launches grassroots petitioning changes

Secretary of State Dennis Richardson announced an administrative rule change to empower grassroots petitioners who are filing ballot initiatives.

As it stands today, opponents of a ballot initiative can manipulate the initiative process by challenging ballot titles in court for the sole purpose of delaying signature gathering. Often this results in delays of 2-3 months or even more, which is especially burdensome for grassroots petitions that do not have the resources to hire a signature gathering service.

This new grassroots petitioning rule will allow petitioners to continue gathering signatures on the official sponsorship templates while a ballot title is being written and challenged in the courts, thereby giving activists more time to gather signa-

tures and avoiding a gap of several months in the signature gathering effort.

“Grassroots petitions empower Oregonians to hold their government accountable,” said Secretary Richardson. “I promised to make participating in our democracy easier for the citizens of our state. Since ballot initiatives are a key tool for direct democracy in Oregon, I am committed to making the process fairer, more straightforward, and less vulnerable to manipulation.”

The problem of using court challenges to delay signature gathering on petitions was identified by Independent Party of Oregon co-Chair Dan Meek, a Portland attorney who frequently works on grassroots petitions and serves as legal representative for the Progressive Party of Oregon.

“The grassroots petitioning rule will make it easier for Oregonians to exercise their right to participate in the democratic process by signing initiative petitions,” commented Dan Meek. “It will help prevent powerful special interest groups from delaying the opportunity to gather signatures for several months, whether or not the ballot title written by the Attorney General is accurate and impartial.”

This rule should reduce court costs by removing the incentive to file lawsuits solely to obstruct and delay the signature gathering process.

This change will apply to any signatures turned in after the rule takes effect, so grassroots petitioners can begin gathering prospective petition signatures on the official sponsorship templates this summer.

— GUEST OPINION —

End of the session

By Rep. Greg Barreto

The last day of the 2017 Oregon legislative session was July 7, 2017. The session was long, it was tiring, and it was frustrating in the last days, but I remain hopeful that we will be able to turn things around in Oregon with the 2018 elections already rapidly approaching. The only way things change for the better is when we elect those that will challenge the status quo.

Over 130 bills were heard and voted on in the last four days of the session. Below is an overview of some of the more controversial measures, some of which may be challenged in court:

SB 719 was passed by the House Democrats on a 31 to 28 vote. SB 719 allows law enforcement to confiscate guns based on a family member saying someone is mentally unstable and should not retain their firearms. It also allows a judge to make the decision instead of a qualified medical professional. This bill challenges “due process” and our 2nd Amendment rights. Our office received over 5,000 emails from Oregonians who were against this bill and I was proud to stand up for them by casting a no vote on this legislation.

HB 3391 passed without a Republican vote in either the House or the Senate and will cost 10 million dollars for abortion on demand including sex selection abortions, mandating that all health care insurance providers apart from Providence must comply. These abortions are allowed until the child is born, extended to undocumented people in Oregon and without a co-pay or deductible. No provisions were given for those wanting a child and facing infertility. This was a dark day for Oregon. Providence protested early, stood their ground and got carved out for religious status. Would have been nice if they would have stood up for the principle and helped other companies fight against this.

HB 2391, the provider tax bill, will also raise the cost of health care and those that purchase insurance. It establishes a 1.5% tax on health insurance providers to help pay for Obamacare for all who reside in the state. For my company, that is already looking at a 27% premium increase will now have an additional \$6000.00 annually and that does not account for their mark-up on the 1.5 increase. Insurance premiums will continue to rise with legislation such as this.

The House Democrats passed HB 2060. A tax bill that would have raised \$667 million of new taxes on the backs of the smallest of Oregon small businesses. The qualifications of the tax increase were tied to the number of employees a business has, not to profits or income. Unbelievable! And they did this on a simple majority vote, defying the Oregon Constitution and the vote of the people that requires a 3/5 majority to approve revenue raising bills. Thankfully this measure was killed in the Senate.

There were a lot of good bills introduced and some good bills passed:

SB 106, SB 481, HB 2101 were public records reform bills that will help modernize availability for Oregonians to information and improve transparency of government.

HB 2066 retained the rural medical provider tax as a tool for attracting and retaining medical professionals in rural areas of the state.

SB 1067 was a cost containing bill that prevents the state from doubling up on insurance benefits for households with two public employee incomes.

SB 372, of which I was a sponsor with Sen. Hansell as Chief Sponsor, was signed into law on June 14, 2017. This law permits the salvaging of game meat for human consumption if it had been killed by a vehicle collision.

SB 373, of which Sen. Hansell and I were Chief Sponsors, directs the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission to establish a pilot program to control urban deer populations in cities where deer constitute a public nuisance. This was signed into law on June 14, 2017.

HB 2382 and its Senate counterpart SB 230, were Bills to increase student achievement, improve college attendance and career placement for students in Ag courses. And compensation for the extensive amount of time that FFA teachers put



Submitted Photo

Rep. Greg Barreto of Cove is a Republican representing House District 58 in Oregon.

in through the summer months. When education in Oregon is lagging behind in national state ranking, FFA programs across the state are a proven bright shining light in building character and leadership qualities in our young people. Throughout education this program is recognized and should be encouraged and rewarded for the product that FFA puts out. JD Cant from Imbler was the catalyst for this legislation which Bill Hansell and I fought hard for that would have enhanced and benefitted education and our FFA programs. This bill or a similar form of it should be introduced in the next long session.

HB 2017 The transportation package that started out at 8.2 billion dollars, a 14-cent gas tax, increased registration fees, employee tax, added fees when purchasing new or used cars, bike tax, gravel tax, tolls on some stretches of road, etc., etc., etc. We were told that if a legislator wanted projects for their district, those members working on the package wanted a commitment early that the legislator would vote for the package, however it turned out. I was not on the committee and was unwilling to commit to the tax and fee increases at the start of the package not knowing how much it would end up costing the people of Oregon. This was a bill that was in a process of continual change and development all the way to the end. Because I and other legislators would not commit to voting yes early, on a bill that was not fully formed, many of our districts were not awarded projects. Those on the transportation committee that put in an inordinate amount of time and effort made out very well and some that committed to vote for it brought projects back to their districts and some projects were actually awarded based on cost/benefit. Transportation is vital to Oregon and there is a huge cost to funding and maintain a statewide need. Republican Rep. Cliff Bentz put his heart and soul into this project and worked diligently, negotiating with a lot of players to see it come about. Republican Rep. Andy Olson, also on the committee, worked hard and got a measure of accountability into the project also.

In the end, the package was whittled down to a little over 5 billion. Gas tax was lowered to 10 cents over 6 years; it still included the employee tax which I totally disagree with because it has nothing to do with transportation and can be easily raised in the future. The best part of the bill in my opinion was the funding for counties and cities for infrastructure maintenance. It was dispersed throughout the state based on a formula based on the number of registered vehicles and miles of road in the counties. This part of the bill will be a significant help to rural areas. Most local elected officials responsible for communities were in favor of any package. A lot of constituents did not want to see gas taxes increased by 20% along with the other fee's, taxes and the Low Carbon Fuels Tax still subsidizing electric cars.

There was much more that went on in Salem over the last six months that I will comment on in future newsletters. And future responsibilities that will take more of my time. The budget issues from this session will continue to grow through the next 12 years as PERS costs will continue to rise for the state, counties, cities and schools. Medicaid costs, individual and business premium costs and availability along with the uncertainty of the health care system in general will be front and center both on a state and national level well into the future.

Thank you for your support, encouragement and even criticisms, knowing that in this business, there are many views on the issues at hand. Special thanks to the crew and leadership at Barreto mfg. that are doing an outstanding job and allow me to do serve in this capacity.

OSP evidence technician arrested

On June 23, 2017, former OSP Evidence Technician Mark Matlick was arrested in Klamath County by OSP detectives and troopers as a result of a lengthy investigation. The investigation revealed that during his time as the Evidence Technician in the Klamath Falls Area Command, he stole over \$10,000 from the Klamath Falls OSP evidence locker. At the time of his arrest in Klamath County, OSP detectives

were continuing their investigation into his actions in Lake County, where he was also responsible for evidence handling.

In Lake County, OSP detectives discovered Matlick had stolen \$2,577.00 and committed additional crimes to conceal the thefts. Matlick was criminally charged with 16 counts based on the following crimes in Lake County:

Theft in the 1st degree,

Computer Crime, Tampering with Public Records, Forgery in the 2nd degree, Official Misconduct in the 1st degree and Official Misconduct in the 2nd degree.

On July 14, 2017, Matlick turned himself into the Lake County jail and was subsequently released after posting bail.

All media inquiries should be referred to Lake County District Attorney Sharon Forster.

VA committee approves GI reform bill

Legislation to ensure wounded members of the National Guard and Reserve receive the education benefits they've earned through the GI Bill was included in a broad, bipartisan veterans' education bill that was approved by the Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs.

The GI Bill Fairness Act—introduced by U.S. Senators Ron Wyden, D-Ore., and John Boozman, R-Ark.—was included in the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 (S.1598), a comprehensive package of legislation that seeks to improve veterans' education benefits and enhance the post-9/11 GI

Bill.

Federal law does not recognize as eligible for Post-9/11 GI Bill education assistance the type of orders (under 10 USC 12301(h)) that members of the Guard or Reserve are often given for their recovery and rehabilitation if they are wounded in combat. The Wyden-Boozman provision would end that unequal treatment by ensuring these service-members are eligible for the same GI Bill benefits as active duty members of the military.

“No member of the military should lose education benefits for getting wounded, but that's the current cruel reality for

men and women serving in the National Guard and Reserve,” Wyden said. “

This reform is necessary because, unlike other members of the military, members of the Guard and Reserve actually lose benefits for being injured in the line of duty. Senator Wyden and I are working to get correct this completely absurd injustice by including this language in the comprehensive bill the committee cleared for passage,” Boozman said.

The U.S. House of Representatives unanimously passed an identical version of the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 earlier this week.

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