

Labor has voice on panel examining Oregon's tax system

Several top labor leaders will be part of a discussion of how to overhaul Oregon's tax system.

The 30-member Task Force on Comprehensive Revenue Restructuring, created by the Oregon Legislature earlier this year, had its first meeting Nov. 29. Meeting monthly, it will have until Nov. 1, 2008 to develop a proposal for the Legislature's 2009 session.

Representing organized labor on the task force are Leslie Frane, executive director of Service Employees International Union Local 503, and Jerry Caruthers, executive director of the Oregon Education Association. Two other labor officials will be among the 13 non-voting members of the task force: Bob Shiprack, executive secretary-treasurer of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council; and Ralph Groener, political coordinator for Oregon AFSCME (American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees) Council 75.

Labor's role was spelled out by House Bill 2530, which set up the task force. Other slots were set aside for businesses, local government officials, and liberal and conservative tax and advocacy groups. The governor made 21 of the 30 appointments. The other nine members of the task force include State Treasurer Randall Edwards, and four state senators and four state representatives. A separate seven-member advisory

council of accountants, economists and tax attorneys will help the task force.

Tim Nesbitt, former president of the Oregon AFL-CIO, will be the governor's staff liaison to the group. Nesbitt is deputy chief of staff to Gov. Ted Kulongoski.

As detailed in House Bill 2530, the task force is supposed to review Oregon's tax structure from top to bottom — not just state revenues, but cities, counties and school districts, too.

The state budget is funded mostly by income tax, while county budgets rely on property tax.

"The counties have a stable revenue source," Nesbitt said. "It just doesn't keep up with growth. The state has a volatile revenue source, but it's one that pays off in good times."

"Our concern will be making sure the tax base is both adequate and equitable," said Frane about her union's involvement. "We want to make sure the tax burden is shouldered appropriately and that working people don't pay a disproportionate share."

The task force will be led by former Republican State Rep. Lane Shetterly of Dallas, Ore. Shetterly led a group of 11 Republicans in the 2005 session of the Legislature who bucked party leadership and voted to refer a temporary income tax surcharge to voters in order to avert budget cuts. The surcharge was defeated by a more than three-to-two margin.

Shetterly then resigned and was appointed by the governor to head the Oregon Department of Land Conservation and Development.

House members on the task force are Phil Barnhart (D-Eugene), Tobias Reed (D-Beaverton), Sal Esquivel (R-Medford) and Scott Bruun (R-West Linn).

The senators are Ginny Burdick (D-Portland), Kurt Schrader (D-Canby), Frank Morse (R-Corvallis) and Rod Monroe (D-Portland).

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