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...Choices for secretary of state

(From Page 1)

Brown said the initiative process has run amok, and that the secretary of state's office will need more resources in order to hire more investigators.

"We've been relying on Our Oregon [a union-backed initiative watchdog group] to be our eyes and ears on the street, and I just think that's the responsibility of the Secretary of State's office," Brown said.

Brown said Bradbury has done a good job but has been limited in what he could do because Republicans controlled the Legislature most of the time he's been in office and weren't receptive to his requests.

In the most recent session of the Legislature, Democrats controlled both House and Senate, but added nothing to the secretary of state's budget to beef up initiative law enforcement, though they did pass a bill giving the secretary of state more tools to crack down on initiative fraud and abuse. In January of this year, for the first time, Bradbury used his own budgetary discretion to hire an initiative fraud investigator.

State Sen. Rick Metsger (D-Mt. Hood) a former KOIN-TV anchorman, says his top three issues in the campaign for secretary of state are "jobs, jobs, jobs." But the secretary of state's office has little to do with economic development and workforce development, which have been the mainstay of Metsger's legislative career. Metsger, chair of the Business, Transportation and Workforce Development Committee, is passionate about having passed several big transportation infrastructure investment packages that are putting thousands of union tradespeople to work.

If elected secretary of state, Metsger says he would use the audits department to take a look at corporate tax breaks to see if they had delivered on the promise of jobs. And he would use his position on the State Land Board to advocate increased logging on state lands, in order to put Oregonians back to work and raise revenue for schools.

Metsger has a list of things he'd like to add to the secretary of state's

portfolio that aren't there now, including the Oregon Economic and Community Development Department, which he'd like to split in two.

Under a little-known state law, the secretary of state also chairs the Oregon Sustainability Board. Metsger wants to beef up that board and give it oversight of state efforts to promote sustainable businesses.

He also would make voter registration a focus, asking the Legislature to fund the establishment of "democracy centers" at universities and community colleges, where volunteers would register young people to vote.

To crack down on initiative abuses, Metsger said he'd hire a full-time investigator, perhaps unaware Bradbury did that in January.

Like Brown and Walker, Metsger earned high marks from the Oregon AFL-CIO and the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council for his votes in the Legislature. One issue he stood out on, however, was his vote against paid family leave, where he was one of five Senate Democrats voting to kill a bill that would have given workers \$250 a week when they use their family leave on the birth of a child; Metsger said he voted against the bill because the Senate leadership introduced it days before the end of the six-month session and tried to rush it through without public hearing or any process; also, it would have been funded by a penny-per-hour payroll tax paid entirely by workers, and Metsger said it wasn't fair to make workers alone shoulder the burden.

State Sen. Vicki Walker's (D-Eugene), campaign Web site features a 16-page paper detailing her ideas for the office. And much of it typifies what she's been known for in the Legislature. A freelance court reporter, Walker is passionate about open public records and campaign finance reform, and fearless at going after fraud and abuse in government. She played a part in the downfall of former governor Neil Goldschmidt. And she's been a fierce critic of SAIF Corporation, the quasi-governmental workers' compensation insurer, for secrecy and cozy financial dealings with lobbyists and

with AOI, the state's premier business lobby.

Her proudest legislative achievements, she says, include laws banning lavish severance payments and golden parachutes among school administrators and prohibiting government agencies from keeping secret any out-of-court settlements that involve payouts. She also helped pass the law that gives unemployment benefits to workers locked out in multi-employer labor disputes. And she's fought to make sure Oregon gets land it's owed by the federal government.

Alone among the three candidates, Walker is endorsing John Kroger for attorney general. And she's the only candidate who echoes what some union leaders say privately — under Bradbury, little has been done to crack down on initiative abuse.

"Our Oregon gave [the Secretary of State's office] examples of fraudulent signatures that had been gathered, and they did nothing," Walker said.

"That's why I want to be secretary of state. That's why I want John Kroger to be attorney general. Because the two of us are going to change the landscape of Oregon."

Walker and Metsger have two years left in their four-year senate terms. Brown's senate seat was up for re-election this year, so she had to give up her seat to run for secretary of state.

Given that all three have been considered union allies, organized labor has mostly avoided taking sides. Most AFL-CIO unions have made no endorsement; the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council endorsed all three. Brown has the backing of the Service Employees International Union and the Oregon Education Association. Walker is endorsed by United Food and Commercial Workers Local 555, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 757, and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. Metsger has no union endorsements, aside from the building trades' triple endorsement.

The Democratic nominee will be determined by the May 20 primary election.