

## ... 2018 Legislature: small gains, big misses

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Bear in mind: Democrats have a 35-25 majority in the House and a 17-13 majority in the Senate.

Sponsored by Democrats, union-supported bills pass the Oregon House, but they die in the Oregon Senate, for two reasons. First, Senate President Peter Courtney (D-Salem) appears permanently wedded to a by-gone vision of bipartisanship, such that he refuses to allow bills to be voted on unless there's at least one Republican in favor. That gives the minority opposition party veto power over the majority agenda — if it can keep just 13 members in line. [When Republican majorities came to power in Wisconsin, Missouri, and Ohio in recent years, they had no such qualms, and swiftly delivered savage



blows to the union movement and lavish tax cuts to business.]

Reason number two is that labor-backed bills—even those that sail through the House — reliably fall short of majority support thanks to two or three corporate Democrats in the Sen-

ate. That must be incredibly frustrating for solid labor Democrats in the Senate, like Michael Dembrow.

There's always next year. Below is the blow by blow.

— Don McIntosh

### BILLS THAT PASSED

**HB 4005: Transparency for outrageous drug price hikes.** If drug companies increase prices more than 10 percent for drugs that cost more than \$100 for a one-month supply, they will have to disclose how much they spend on research as opposed to marketing and profit, whether a generic is available, how much they charge for the drug in other countries, where governments regulate and limit drug prices. That's thanks to a bill sponsored by State Rep (and nurse union rep) Rob Nosse (D-Portland), which passed

46-14 in the House and 25-4 in the Senate. The bill was backed by hospitals and insurance companies and won the support of all Democrats and about half the Republicans (but not Knute Buehler, who sided with the drug companies).

**SB 1528: No double tax cuts for pass-through businesses.** The recent tax bill passed by Congress was on track to cost \$250 million to the state budget because of the way state income taxes are linked to the federal income tax. A 2013 state law brokered by then-governor John Kitzhaber already gave so-called pass-through

businesses lower tax rates than wage earners; letting the two bills work together would have delivered a huge tax break to the top 1 percent of incomes. But lawmakers passed a bill to ensure that Oregon does not copy into state law the new federal tax deduction. It passed the House 32-28 and the Senate 16-to-13. All Republicans voted against it, and they were joined by four Democrats: Betsy Johnson (Scappoose) in the Senate, and Paul Evans (Monmouth), Janelle Bynum (Happy Valley), and Caddy McKeown (Coos Bay) in the House.

### BILLS THAT FAILED

**HB 4160: Paid Family and Medical Leave.** Oregon used to be a trailblazer. It passed the Oregon Family and Medical Leave Act in 1987, and six years later, Congress passed a nationwide version of it. But the leave mandated by both laws is unpaid, and many workers can't afford to take it. In 2007, the Oregon House passed a bill to set up a paid leave insurance program funded by a small payroll tax, only to see it fail in the Senate. Since then, California, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Washington have passed such programs. But not Oregon. This year's version of the bill didn't get a hearing. Advocates expect to try again in 2019.

**HB 4113: Let teachers unions bargain over class size.** Shouldn't there be a limit to the number of kids in a kindergarten class? Oregon teachers think

so. But school districts refuse to negotiate over class size. For years, the teachers unions pushed lawmakers to make it a mandatory subject of collective bargaining. This year, their bill passed the House 34-24, . . . and died in the Senate without a vote. Let the record show that three House Republicans voted for it: Jeffrey Helfrich (Hood River), Andy Olson (Albany), Greg Smith (Heppner); while four House Democrats voted against it: Deborah Boone (Cannon Beach) Pam Marsh (Ashland), Jeff Reardon (Happy Valley), Janeen Sollman (Hillsboro).

**HB 4154: Crack down on wage theft.** Should we make general contractors take ultimate responsibility when they contract with unscrupulous construction subcontractors who cheat workers out of wages, get caught, and skip town? A 31-26 majority of the Oregon House thought so,

but . . . the bill died in the Senate without a vote. Notably, every Republican state rep voted against it (including Knute Buehler, who wants to be governor), and three House Democrats joined them: Janelle Bynum (Clackamas), Caddy McKeown (Coos Bay), and Mark Meek (Gladstone).

**HJR 203: Make health care a right.** Since 2006, State Rep Mitch Greenlick (D-Portland) has pushed to give voters a chance to amend the state Constitution to declare that it is the obligation of the state to ensure that every resident of Oregon has access to cost-effective, medically appropriate and affordable health care as a fundamental right. This year it passed the House 35-25 along strict party lines, with every Democrat in favor and every Republican opposed . . . and died in the Senate without a vote.

### A BAD BILL THAT WAS DEFEATED

**HB 4093:** The Portland Winterhawks ice hockey team tried to legislate its way out of a class action lawsuit in which players are attempting to be classified as employees. Their bill would have exempted amateur

ice hockey players from workers' compensation. Incredibly, the bill passed the House 35-23, with support from every Republican and 12 of the 35 House Democrats: Jeff Barker (Aloha), Deborah Boone (Cannon Beach), Janelle Bynum (Clackamas), Brian Clem (Salem), Margaret Doherty (Tigard), Mitch Greenlick

(Portland), Ken Helm (Beaverton), Sheri Malstrom (Beaverton), Caddy McKeown (Coos Bay), Susan McLain (Hillsboro), Jeff Reardon (Happy Valley), and Brad Witt (Clatskanie). Unions rallied in outraged opposition and were able to prevent a vote on it in the Senate.

## UNION ORGANIZING

### Oregon State University faculty launch union campaign

OSU professors could join the union that represents fellow faculty at UO and PSU, WOU

of the union, including ensuring shared governance of the university and securing working conditions that promote excellence.

UAOSU is a joint project of American Federation of Teachers and American Association of University Professors.

If the union effort succeeds, it would join five public universities in Oregon that are unionized: University of Oregon, Portland State, Western Oregon, Eastern Oregon, and Southern Oregon. Only the Institute of Technology in Klamath Falls is be nonunion.

A drive to unionize faculty at Oregon State University (OSU) is in the final stages. On Feb. 15, supporters of the United Academics of Oregon State University (UAOSU) began collecting signatures on union authorization cards. Under Oregon law, if a majority of the faculty sign the cards within 180 days, their union would automatically be recognized.

On March 5, the campaign announced a milestone: posters with the union mission statement signed by over 1,000 faculty. The mission statement lists goals

#### ONLINE EXTRA

Find out more about the campaign at [uaosu.org](http://uaosu.org)

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