

Oregon's new voice

Rep. Tina Kotek becomes the state's new Speaker of the House, on the support of a Democratic majority and the expectations of a state in need of change

BY JOANNE ZUHL
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To mark her swearing in as the state's newest House Speaker, Oregon Rep. Tina Kotek presented lawmakers with a gift, the book "Toward One Oregon." It's a collection of writings intended to bridge the state's cultural and geographical diversities, and symbolic of the interconnectivity Kotek has emphasized from the moment she took the oath of office on Jan. 14.

"We're one state," she said, speaking with Street Roots just days before the event. "You have issues in your community that are the same as mine. They may look different, but they are the same issues."

Kotek has served Portland's North and Northeast state district since 2006, often as a champion of human services programs for needy families who were often on the short end of budget cuts. "That focus won't change," Kotek says, now that she's speaker of the House. "I'm going to continue to ask hard questions and prioritizing those vulnerable parts of our state, people who don't have a place to live or food on the table."

We talked with Speaker Kotek about her agenda moving forward, the momentum of the Democratic majority, and where Oregon's financial footing will take us in 2013.

Joanne Zuhl: *How is Oregon's financial health? We haven't heard good news about money in a long time.*

Tina Kotek: We haven't. But the revenue picture is improving slowly but steady. The important word is steady. Oregon's actually doing very well in terms of rebuilding and bringing people back into work. But we're not going to have all the money we need to make up for all the cuts. So the biggest thing for us is prioritizing those dollars. There will be a lot of interest in putting it into the schools. I think we're at the point now where our schools can't take any more cuts. And if we're really going to build for the future, you need your schools to be strong.

That being said, I'm very interested in making sure we have essential

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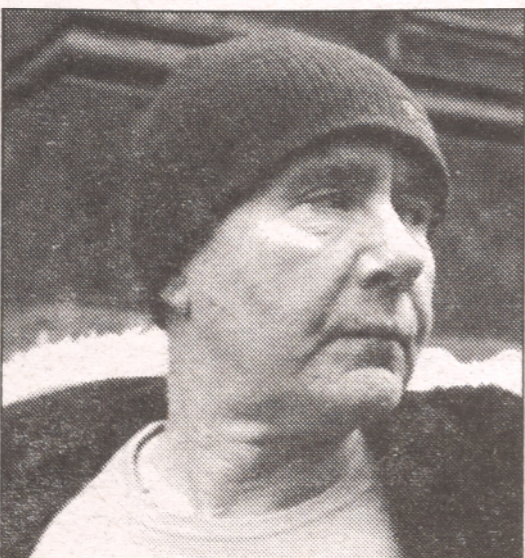


"We can all go back to our little silos and talk about 'I've got mine, everything's fine.' Or we say, what do we want the state to look like for everybody, and how do we build to a different future."

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