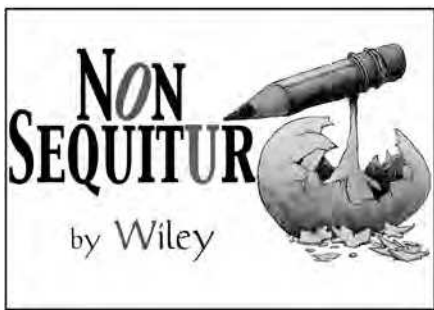




Big Tent Still Standing

OREGON DEMOCRATS ARE SMARTER THAN THEY LOOK

It's halftime at the state Capitol when Salem's cherry trees blossom. As usual my political predictions for this session have pretty much gone up in smoke. That's not surprising, given that I counseled Rep. Paul Holvey years ago to give up on field-burning as an issue — I reasoned it was a futile fight. The rest is history.

Earlier this session I predicted Democrats would be victims of their own success and that having super-majorities in both chambers would be a recipe for inter-family partisan feuds. But Democrats in both chambers seem to be marching right along; of 2,600 bills filed, 200 have passed already.

Caucus leaders and committee chairs have quietly moved some key pieces of their pre-session agenda. An adequate education budget, tax reform, the housing crisis, protecting Medicaid and carbon reduction were the main issues coming into session. So far, an agreement has been reached on Medicaid funding, and we have a first-in-the-nation statewide rent control bill already passed and signed into law.

There is also excellent work being done by the Joint Committee on Student Success. They are getting bi-partisan support and some business support to seek an additional \$2 billion for education. Local House members Nancy Nathanson, Julie Fahey and John Lively all sit on that committee. And Springfield Sen. Lee Beyer and Lively both serve on the Joint Committee on Carbon Reduction. Its co-chair, Sen. Michael Dembrow, has patiently constructed a compromise, HB 2020, that will move to the House floor soon. A minority report could slow it down a bit, but it's likely headed for a vote in both chambers.

Senate Judiciary chair Floyd Prozanski is knee deep in crafting an omnibus gun bill. SB 978 encompasses a variety of issues.

It will protect large retailers from lawsuits arising from a business decision to prohibit the sale of firearms to youth under 21 years old, (e.g., Bi-Mart was sued recently by an 18 year-old for "age discrimination" when it changed its policy to prohibit sales to youth under 21.)

It will provide for the safe storage of firearms, and create a low sanction (Class D violation) for unsafe or unlawful storage.

It will direct the Oregon Health Authority to make rules regarding reporting of firearm injuries and creating a state database.

It will address the issue of 3-D printing of firearms, metal detectors and registered serial numbers.

And it will address the sticky issue of local governments' authority to have restrictions on firearms in public buildings.

Prozanski and Fahey also serve on the Joint Committee on Capitol Culture. This committee's task is to address the sexual

harassment "culture" in the Legislature and the \$1.3 million settlement just announced in early March. Both legislators feel confident that the committee has developed a proposal to take the complaint procedure out of the hands of legislative counsel and refer harassment complaints to a truly independent outside investigation.

And finally, the outbreak of measles has folks paying attention to stronger vaccination laws. Non-medical exemptions are a threat to herd immunization.

Overall, I'd give the Legislature a B+ rating — so far. They're working hard, not too much drama. Now if we could just help them find the votes for additional revenue.

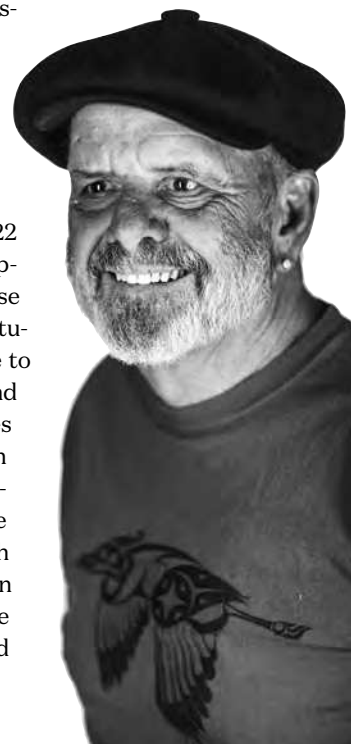
There is no small irony that this sense of focus and quiet purpose follows the ugly pre-session spectacle of institutional sexual harassment allegations and a lack of proper oversight by Democratic and Republican leaders. It was followed by that subsequent settlement during the first half of the session. But it appears that the settlement that was announced, and, more important, the work being done by legislators from both parties to assure that such conduct and culture is not tolerated going forward, have had a sobering effect on Salem. (However, not enough to lower Oregon's DUI blood alcohol limit to .05 percent. That bill died.)

Granted, it's not all peaches and cream.

There are always winners and losers in this process. This year's deadline for moving bills from one chamber to the other passed with a few notable victims.

High school students, for example, failed to keep SB 822 alive. The bill would have supplied free condoms to those aforementioned high school students. I guess now they'll have to pretend they're Catholic and practice rhythm or the blues for birth control. And basin wildrye fans everywhere are bemoaning the failure of Senate Concurrent Resolution 5, which would have recognized basin wildrye as the official state grass. I always thought it should be hemp anyway.

Stay tuned! ■



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