

Tax bill produces political dilemma for Gov. Brown

Republican rival urges veto

By JEFF MAPES
Oregon Public Broadcasting

A tax bill affecting tens of thousands of small businesses in Oregon is posing a political dilemma for Gov. Kate Brown.

"We're taking a very hard look at the bill," Brown told reporters after the Legislature adjourned. "We're looking at the implications for Oregon's small businesses and Oregon's economy."

The governor, who is running for re-election, will make enemies no matter what she does. Many of her fellow Democrats and advocates for education and other public services are pushing her to sign the bill.

But critics of the bill say she could anger hundreds

of thousands of small-business owners in the state if she doesn't veto the measure.

Brown also faces the possibility that the tax bill could be referred to the November ballot. That would force her to defend what is technically a tax hike during the fall campaign.

"I understand the position she is in," said state Senate Finance Chairman Mark Hass, D-Beaverton, who played a major role in crafting the bill. "She is running for governor."

Democrats pushed SB 1528 through the Legislature in response to the federal tax-cut legislation signed by President Donald Trump last year.

In its own income-tax code, Oregon automatically adopts many federal definitions of income. And one of the biggest impacts of the

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National Federation of Independent Business

new federal law is that it would deliver an automatic tax cut for many of the more than 400,000 business owners who pay personal income taxes on their profits.

That would cost Oregon more than \$200 million a year in lost income. Groups ranging from public employee unions to Children First for Oregon pushed for the state bill's passage.

But small business groups launched their own lobbying effort, saying it was unfair and burdensome for Oregon to take away the state tax cut embedded in the federal law.

Anthony Smith, Oregon state director for the National Federation of Independent Business, said state financial projections show the federal tax cut bill will eventually make more money for the

state — even without taking away the new break for small businesses.

"This (bill) is producing a considerable amount of revenue for the state and it's going to come from somewhere," he said, "and it is from small businesses."

Bend Rep. Knute Buehler, the leading candidate for the Republican gubernatorial nomination, also made it clear he's ready to make the measure a campaign issue. He sent out a press release titled: "Gov. Brown Should Veto Mom & Pop Tax Hike."

Rep. Julie Parrish, R-West Linn, also fought the bill during the legislative session. She is being warily eyed by Democrats.

That's because she led the campaign to refer hospital and insurance taxes on Medicaid to a statewide vote in January. Voters upheld the taxes, but

Parrish showed she's capable of collecting the 59,000 signatures needed to put an issue on the ballot.

Parrish said she hasn't ruled out launching a referendum if Brown signs the business tax bill, although she said it would be more difficult because she would face a tighter time frame for collecting signatures.

Still, Parrish added, "I think it's politically savvy for the governor to be taking a pause on this one" because small-business owners tend to vote in large percentages.

Hass, the Senate finance chairman, said the threat of a referendum is always high when it comes to tax legislation. However, he added, "I don't think we should let fear guide good policy."

Brown has until mid-April to take action on the bill. Signatures for a referral would have to be collected by early June.

Oregon health officials warn people not to take kratom due to salmonella risk

By KRISTIAN FODEN-VENCIL
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon health officials are warning people not to use the herbal supplement kratom after testing found salmonella in numerous samples.

The warning comes after two Oregonians fell ill from taking the product. One person was hospitalized, but both have now recovered.

Epidemiologists at the Public Health Division of the Oregon Health Authority said the cases in Washington and Malheur counties are linked to a national outbreak that's sickened 48 people in 30 states.

State epidemiologists, along with representatives of Washington County Public Health and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, obtained kratom capsules and powders from Torched Illu-



Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian

Testing found salmonella in numerous samples of kratom.

sions at its two locations in Beaverton and Tigard.

The state said the samples were tested by a private laboratory and a total of 15 samples tested positive for salmonella bacteria.

— are popping up in kratom products," said Oregon state epidemiologist Dr. Katrina Hedberg.

Advocates of the herbal supplement say it can be used for pain relief and to treat opiate addiction.

People who believe they've gotten sick from consuming kratom should contact a health care provider.

"We don't yet know the ultimate source of all the contaminated kratom. Because of this, we recommend people not consume kratom in any form and throw it away," she said.

Washington state issued a similar warning last week after three people fell ill.

Each year, 400 to 500 cases of infection from salmonella are reported in Oregon. Most people infected with the bacteria develop diarrhea, fever and abdominal cramps a few days after exposure.

Tillamook man reaches plea deal in child sex case

By JACK HEFFERNAN
The Daily Astorian

A Tillamook man who allegedly paid for sex with a teenage boy has agreed to serve 30 days in jail and two years of probation.

Neil Alexander Dowell, 29, allegedly paid for sex with the 16-year-old boy in August after communicating with him online. Dowell pleaded no contest Wednesday to second-degree online sexual corruption and purchasing sex with a minor and was released from jail.

He originally faced charges of luring a minor and two counts of prostitution before the agreement with the Clatsop County District Attorney's Office.

Dowell also was found guilty in February of first-de-

gree forgery and driving under the influence of intoxicants after reaching a plea deal in a separate case. He was arrested in July after passing fake \$20 bills twice at Burger King on Marine Drive.

Police later executed a search warrant and found more counterfeit money and a small amount of heroin in his car. Judge Cindee Matyas sentenced him to 12 days in jail, three years of probation and ordered him to pay a \$1,495 fine.

Dowell is scheduled to be sentenced in May for the sex crimes.



Neil Alexander Dowell

Female firefighter to lead Forest Service amid scandal

By MATTHEW BROWN
Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. — A female wildland firefighter has been tapped by the Trump administration to steady the U.S. Forest Service as it reels from allegations of sexual misconduct and struggles to change its male-dominated culture.

Vickie Christensen was appointed interim chief of the 35,000-employee agency late Thursday. The move came roughly 24 hours after former Chief Tony Tooke abruptly retired following revelations of an investigation into alleged relationships with subordinates.

Christiansen has been with the Forest Service for seven years and became a deputy chief in 2016. Before joining the federal government she'd worked in forestry for 30 years at the state level, in Arizona and Washington state.

Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue said she was tasked with two goals: improving the agency's response to sexual misconduct while effectively managing more than 300,000 square miles of forests and grasslands in 43 states and Puerto Rico.

The agency's widespread problems mirror recent misconduct scandals within the nation's other major pub-

lic lands agency, the Interior Department.

Tooke's departure came just days after PBS NewsHour reported he was under investigation following relationships with subordinates prior to his

appointment last August.

The events renewed calls from Congress to more aggressively address long-standing and rampant problems of sexual harassment, bullying and in some cases rape.

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