

Oregon joint tax panel starts work next week

By PETER WONG
Capital Bureau

SALEM — The Oregon Legislature's discussion about tax changes — including whether there will be a new form of taxation for business receipts — is about to go public again.



Smith

The Legislature's presiding officers on Thursday formally appointed a joint House-Senate committee — all of them members of the standing tax-writing committees for the 2017 session — and the committee has set its first two meetings.

At 8:30 a.m. on May 2, the committee will hear a presentation from Paul Warner, who as legislative revenue officer is the Legislature's chief tax analyst.

Warner and his staff have been working with a small bipartisan group of lawmakers behind the scenes looking at business tax alternatives.

At 8:30 a.m. on May 4, the committee has planned a general discussion.

Sen. Mark Hass, a Democrat from Beaverton and co-chairman of the joint committee, said he hopes something will emerge from the process.

But he also said progress will hinge on majority Democrats and minority Republicans setting aside some of their political divisions stemming from the 2016 short session and the Measure 97 campaign that

ended in defeat last fall.

Measure 97, which voters rejected by a 60 percent majority, would have levied a 2.5 percent gross receipts tax on businesses with Oregon sales exceeding \$25 million annually.

The next two-year state budget cycle, which starts July 1, has a projected gap of \$1.6 billion between spending and anticipated income.

A joint committee, if legislation emerges, would allow for a single set of hearings instead of separate hearings in each chamber. Also, a joint committee is not subject to the same deadlines that apply to most legislation in the session, which is scheduled to end in early July.

It is possible that the committee could prepare a ballot measure for referral to voters later this year.

Senate members in addition to Hass are Democrats Chuck Riley of Hillsboro and Kathleen Taylor of Milwaukie, and Republicans Brian Boquist of Dallas and Herman Baertschiger Jr. of Grants Pass.

House members are Rep. Phil Barnhart, D-Eugene, panel co-chairman; Democrats Barbara Smith Warner, Diego Hernandez and Rob Nosse, all of Portland, and Pam Marsh of Ashland, and Republicans Cliff Bentz of Ontario, Knute Buehler of Bend, Mark Johnson of Hood River and Greg Smith of Heppner.

BRIEFLY

Skeletal remains in Idaho badger den are from 2 children

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho authorities say experts examining what was initially believed to be one child's remains found in a badger hole turns out to be the remains of two children.

The Elmore County Sheriff's Office tells the *Idaho Statesman* in a story on Monday that initial estimates are that one child is 3 to 5 years old and the other 4 to 9.

Workers with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game found the remains on April 15 protruding from a grave being used as a badger den.

Elmore County Sheriff Mike Hollinshead says the remains could have been there for up to two decades. He says archaeologists determined the remains aren't from Oregon Trail emigrants or part of a Native American burial ground.

Noise, traffic, fishing are impacts of coal project

SEATTLE (AP) — A new environmental study says a coal-export terminal proposed in southwest Washington would have major impacts on local communities, access to tribal fishing sites and rail safety.

Millennium Bulk Terminals-Longview is proposing a terminal along the Columbia River near Longview to handle up to 44 million tons of coal a year. Coal would arrive by train from Montana and Wyoming to be loaded on ships for export to Asia.

The review released Friday by the Department of Ecology and Cowlitz County analyzed 23 environmental issues and found 19 where there were negative impacts.

Ecology Director Maia Bellon says all of those issues are concerning, but especially the impact on people's health. Millennium CEO Bill Chapman called the study a "strong step forward."

The review will be used by agencies in deciding permits required for the project.

Meanwhile, project developers have sued the state after they were denied a sublease for state aquatic

lands. The case is pending in Cowlitz County Superior Court.

Man menaces Hispanic driver, jumps on hood

PORTLAND (AP) — Police in Oregon arrested a man who they say threatened to kill a woman while calling her a "dirty Mexican."

Court documents show the victim reported the attack Tuesday night. The woman told Portland police she just left work when a man started taking pictures of her and her license plate. She said he yelled "America deserves better" and jumped on her car.

He then grabbed a bottle from his car and used it to bang on her window while making the threat.

The man allegedly caused more than \$1,000 damage to the woman's car before driving away.

A witness took down the license plate of the man's vehicle. Police arrested the suspect, 35-year-old Joseph Leineweber, when he showed up in court on an unrelated allegation that he harassed a pastor.

Leineweber is charged with criminal mischief, intimidation and menacing. Court-appointed attorney Kami White did not immediately return a phone message.

Ex-city recorder receives plea hearing extension

ISLAND CITY (AP) — A former city recorder in Oregon accused of abusing her governmental power has received a three- to four-week extension for her plea hearing.

The Observer reported Thursday that Judy Rygg's attorney requested the extension because a plea offer from the district attorney's office had been late and includes more than 1,000 pages of evidence.

The plea hearing has been rescheduled for May 23. Rygg has been charged with eight felony counts of first-degree theft, nine felony counts of computer crime, a misdemeanor count of second-degree theft and one count each of first-degree official misconduct and tampering with public records.



AP Photo/Greg Wahl-Stephens

Gaggle guard

Kim Giroux helps herd a gaggle of geese down a sidewalk past heavy traffic across the Ross Island Bridge in Portland on Tuesday. All made it safely across.

Walden backs bill cutting pre-existing coverage

By JEFF MAPES
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Oregon Congressman Greg Walden indicated Thursday he supports the latest version of the Republican bill that would repeal and replace Obamacare.

The GOP lawmaker's support for the bill comes even though the new bill would allow states to drop certain protections for people with pre-existing health conditions.

Walden repeatedly told constituents at town halls earlier this month that he would not support legislation allowing insurers to hike costs on sick patients.

Critics of Republican attempts to come up with an alternative to the Affordable Care Act — often called Obamacare — say Walden's



EO file photo

U.S. Rep. Greg Walden talks about the work he has done in Congress at a town hall meeting in February at the SAGE Center in Boardman.

support doesn't square with his promises on pre-existing conditions.

Patrick Willard of Families USA, a Washington, D.C., advocacy group, said Walden claims to "support protecting people with pre-existing conditions" but then pulls "a bait-and-

switch."

Walden spokesman Andrew Malcolm said in an email to OPB that Walden supports the latest version of the bill, which was worked out in negotiations with the House Freedom Caucus. Members of that caucus played a big role in denying House leaders the support they needed to pass an earlier version of the bill in March.

Malcolm did not respond to requests for explanation why Walden is supporting a bill that many see as weakening provisions the congressman has previously described as crucial.

In an April 13 town hall in The Dalles, Walden said, "We're not going back to the days when [insurers] could underwrite you, say, 'Oh yeah, we'll cover you.'"

It will just be so expensive you can't afford it. That is not a plan I'm going to support."

Willard, of Families USA, said that under this new version of the health care bill, Oregon could continue to offer a full range of protections for those with pre-existing conditions.

But he added it could turn into a "race to the bottom" if many states decide to waive those protections.

Several supporters of the new version of the bill insist it will still provide needed protections. Rep. Tom MacArthur, R-N.J., who worked out the provisions of the new version with members of the freedom caucus, told CNN it will protect "vulnerable people" while giving more flexibility to states.



ENERGY COSTS TOO HIGH? TRY LOOKING AT IT IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT.

Want to lower your energy costs? When you update lighting and other equipment, you can see the difference instantly and recoup your investment in no time. Talk to a qualified trade ally to learn about Energy Trust of Oregon cash incentives for all kinds of energy-saving solutions.

➕ Get more from your energy. Visit www.energytrust.org/mybusiness or call us at 1.866.368.7878.

Serving customers of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural, Cascade Natural Gas and Avista.

