

Gov. Brown lays out the goals for her final term

By Aubrey Wieber
Oregon Capitol Bureau

SALEM — Gov. Kate Brown wants the state to get ambitious about solving major challenges such as a homelessness, challenging legislators on Monday in her state of the state address before hundreds of lawmakers, their families and the public in a packed House chamber.

“For years we have struggled to overcome the impacts of recession on our state revenue, to build up adequate funding for our education system, and stabilize access to health care,” Brown said.

But now there is opportunity, she continued. The state is experiencing rapid growth. New jobs and ideas are being born daily. Some are thriving, but others have been negatively impacted by this period of prosperity, and Oregon has the means to



Portland Tribune/Jaime Valdez

Gov. Kate Brown is sworn in Monday by Martha Lee Walters, chief justice of the Oregon Supreme Court, during a ceremony at the Capitol.

step in.

Brown spoke on the opening day of the 2019 Legislature after she was sworn in for her final term as governor.

Before entering the chamber, Brown was preceded by former governors Ted Kulongoski and Barbara Roberts, the Oregon leaders Brown has leaned on and

praised most. The BRAVO Youth Orchestra filled the large hall with “Sir Duke” by Stevie Wonder.

Then Brown took to the floor and was sworn in by Chief Justice Martha Lee Walters.

Her speech hit themes she carried on the campaign trail and underscored in her proposed state budget for

the 2019-21 biennium. She offered little new as she rallied legislators to her cause.

Brown mostly received applause from the crowd, but at one point, after warning incoming legislators to prepare for the dirty side of politics, three people in the audience stood and shouted “stop the pipeline” before being removed.

She did key in on homelessness, asking for quick action out of the Capitol.

“Across Oregon, communities large and small are struggling with homelessness,” Brown said. “This crisis is playing out on our streets — and on our sidewalks.”

Brown asked lawmakers to quickly approve \$20 million in bonds to pay for 200 homes for the chronically homeless. While Brown was applauded at nearly every pause in her speech, this request received audible approval from only a

handful of the more progressive members of the Legislature, such as Sen. Shemia Fagan, the new chair of the Senate housing committee. Most lawmakers remained silent.

She endorsed legislation proposed by House Speaker Tina Kotek, D-Portland, Senate Majority Leader Ginny Burdick, D-Portland, and Sen. Laurie Monnes Anderson, D-Gresham, that caps rent increases each year at 7 percent for all rentals in Oregon.

“Oregon families are counting on us,” she said.

In a normal year, a huge education spending package, cap and trade or a plan to seriously tackle Oregon’s homelessness issue could define a legislative session. But in 2019, Brown is asking lawmakers to tackle all of them, and more, while passing new taxes to fund the new initiatives. On Monday, she worked to sell

them on the aspirational path she’s outlined.

“The time is now. Our future is in front of us. We have to turn the corner and make it a reality,” Brown said in closing. “Together we can build a better Oregon.”

She also endorsed centralizing state contracts to give Oregon more leverage in negotiations. The idea came from Secretary of State Dennis Richardson. Richardson found in an audit released in December that a modernized system could have saved the state \$1.6 billion from 2015 to 2017.

Brown also leaned on Oregon’s youth to illustrate why lawmakers should back her goals. She talked about a card she received from 10-year-old Abner. On one side the Portland boy drew an Earth suffering from climate change.

“Hot, hot, hot read the caption,” Brown said. “Europe was frowning.”

Decades later, Courtney again takes aim at DUI threshold

By Aubrey Wieber
Oregon Capital Bureau

As a state representative in 1983, Peter Courtney introduced legislation to lower the drunk driving threshold from .10 blood alcohol content to .08.

It was a radical move from a new lawmaker who was expected to bide his time. Courtney had little support outside of a budding advocacy group called Mothers Against Drunk Driving, but he introduced the bill anyway.

It passed and Oregon and Utah became the first states to move to a .08 threshold for drunk driving. Courtney proved to be ahead of the times, as it wasn’t until 1998 that President Bill Clinton called on all states to enact the .08 standard.

Now Courtney wants Oregon to be a leader again. He is taking the political point to push Oregon to an even more strict limit — .05.

“You’re not as good after you drink as you are before you drink,” he said.

Today, Courtney said, drivers are confronted in their cars with more lights and screens than ever. Add in bike lanes and homeless people walking around at night, and there is too much distraction while driving something that can be used as a deadly weapon, he said.

He knows his proposal will be unpopular.

“Sooner or later, you’re going to have to fight that battle,” Courtney said. “You don’t wait until the timing’s perfect. You don’t wait until everything lines up.”

Courtney said he’s always

been keenly aware of the downsides of alcohol, which has killed several chronic drinkers in his family. But this isn’t about drinking, it’s about safety, he said.

“I’m not trying to stop you from drinking,” Courtney said. “I’m not trying to stop this explosion of brew pubs. Go, all of you. Go tonight, go every night. I’m not trying to make a statement about drinking.”

So far, Courtney is missing crucial allies.

Mothers Against Drunk Driving so far isn’t endorsing the Courtney move and Oregon State Police are “neutral” on the idea. Capt. Tim Fox said there is no research on the difference of impairment at .05 and .08. Superintendent Travis Hampton said if the new limit were to pass, OSP wouldn’t have enough



Peter Courtney

troopers to enforce the new law.

Courtney is undeterred. “I’ll be talking with him,” Courtney said of Hampton.

And that’s the law enforcement and anti-drunk driving community. Oregon also has robust wine, craft beer, spirits and restaurant industries with powerful lobbies.

Greg Astley, the government affairs director for the Oregon Restaurant and Lodging Association, said

the proposal misses the mark, saying a 120-pound woman could get arrested for having one glass of wine after work.

Drivers can be cited for being under the influence of less than .08, but the penalties are less severe. In 2017, of the 4,671 DUI arrest, 184 drivers registered less than .08, according to OSP data.

The penalties that apply to the current limit would also be linked to the lower limit under Courtney’s proposed legislation. That means drivers involved in fatal accidents who are found to be impaired at the .05 level could face negligent homicide charges.

Astley said reducing the limit could make people fearful of going to happy hour or ordering a drink with dinner. Meanwhile, he said, there are

more and more people under the influence of marijuana getting behind the wheel.

“It seems like this bill is trying to zero in on a very narrow subset of people that under current law wouldn’t be impaired,” he said.

But Courtney said this increased regulation is part of the progression of society. With ridesharing apps like Uber and Lyft, it’s easier than ever to not drive after drinking. It’s a practice he’s started himself.

In recent years, New York, Delaware, Hawaii and Washington considered but rejected moves to the lower limit.

Courtney acknowledged that may be the fate his idea endures in Oregon.

“Well alright then, I’ll lose, but I’m still not pulling the bill,” he said.

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