

Oregon legislators keep busy during interim

Salem Scene

A lot of Oregonians still believe the State Legislature meets for six months every two years and takes a long rest between biennial sessions. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is true that following adjournment our 90 state

lawmakers return to their homes from Salem and the frantic pace that extends from January into July of odd-numbered years tends to slacken. But make no mistake, your

elected Senators and Representatives continue to work. An example during the current interim—the word used to describe the 18 months

between sessions—might be the Legislature's Joint Interim Task Force on Small Business. One of more than 18 study groups to examine issues worthy of legislative consideration by the 60th Assembly when it convenes next Jan. 9, this Task Force spent 97 days earlier this year

looking into dilemmas facing Oregon's smaller businesses. Headed by Co-Chairmen Sen. Mike Thorne (D-Pendleton) and Rep. Ed Lindquist (D-Milwaukie), the 12-member Task Force quickly discovered it had a tiger by the tail. For instance, there are

more than 51,000 nonfarm firms in Oregon and 89.5 per cent employ 49 or fewer workers—providing employment for more than 50 per cent of the state's nonfarm workforce. It also discovered, after surveying more than 8,000 businesses, that government

regulations, government paperwork and taxes are the major causes of headaches among members of the state's small business community! The Task Force didn't just send questionnaires to businesses however, it also conducted a series of hearings throughout the state. These

fact-finding meetings were conducted in Portland, Eugene, North Bend, Newport, Lincoln City, The Dalles, Pendleton, Redmond, Canyonville and Medford. Additionally, the Task Force conducted a joint meeting with the Joint Standing Committee on Trade & Economic Development in Portland and four other meetings of its own in Salem.

Essentially, the panel discovered testimony from more than 80 individuals tended to verify results of the survey. The fact-finding hearings revealed additional complaints and problems however, and the Task Force concluded its deliberations by issuing an impressive list of 25 recommendations.

Some are aimed at individual state agencies, some have been delivered to the Executive Department and others provide ammunition for continuing studies by Trade & Economic Development. More than a few will become legislative proposals when the full legislature convenes again.

Only a half-dozen topics were discarded without recommendations and most of those because other legislative or governmental activities deal with them.

One of the discards however, was part of the panel's original assignment. That was to determine a valid definition for small business. Because of the many criteria considered when constituting precisely what makes a business small or large—coupled with the fact there is no consensus among other governments already utilizing small business definitions—the Task Force simply gave up.

Sixty-six per cent of businesses responding to the statewide survey expressed the opinion a small business was one with 100 employees or less. But even that figure is contested in view of the fact nearly 90 per cent of all Oregon nonfarm businesses employ 49 or fewer workers.

In all, the Small Business Task Force considered problems ranging from the previously mentioned regulations, paperwork and taxes to consumer protection, environmental issues, organized labor and land use planning.

It is interesting to note the latter subject was considered extensively by the Task Force and it recommended the Land Conservation & Development Commission give its goal involving the "Economy of the State" LCDC's highest priority.

Other subjects resulting in recommendations involve minimum wages, capital formation, an ombudsman for business, inventory tax, workers' compensation, unemployment, building permits, bad checks, corporate taxes, inspections and education for small business people.

From a businessperson's standpoint—and the dozen lawmakers who served on this particular Task Force—sufficient issues were studied to pretty much occupy the next Legislature for months.

When you consider 17 other Task Forces also have been working and making recommendations—and another half-dozen will conduct additional studies yet this year—two facts emerge:

Our lawmakers are busy between sessions. And the next session won't set records for brevity.

Andersons visited by daughter

Mr. and Mrs. Ervin Anderson enjoyed having Portland guests, their daughter Dee Martin and granddaughters Suzanne Martin and Alison Parent, in their Heppner home over July 4th weekend. The granddaughters went to lone for the fireworks.

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