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Gate City Journal 372-2233

## Salem Scene

by Jack Zimmerman

Oregon's amateur lawmakers already have achieved semi-pro status during this 57th session of the State Legislature and will get at least a taste of the really big time before adjournment sine die.

The amateur status of traditional part time solons in Oregon revolves around a couple of long-held concepts. First, a Legislature that meets only biennially is less expensive. And second, members of such a body are better able to maintain close touch with constituents and are dependent upon employment of other types to sustain themselves and their families.

Under such a plan, service in the Legislature becomes a sacrifice in the name of public service. Opponents to annual sessions, for instance, long have held that yearly meetings simply would increase the cost of state government and produce professional, big league politicians too greatly preoccupied with sustaining themselves in office.

This concept was just fine, say those who favor annual sessions, as long as Oregon was a rural state and the problems of conducting state government were relatively simple. But the situation has changed now, they aver. Today the biennial bill for state government hovers in the \$3 billion range. Oregon has become a high service state—one which provides a lot of government assistance to its residents. Its sources of re-

venue are varied and dependent, to a disproportionate degree, on the vagaries of the economy—both statewide and nationally.

An example this session is the decision by House and Senate leadership to fund major state agencies for only one year during the present session and to return about this time next year to finish the budgetary task. The reasons for such action, they say, are necessitated by the federal government's reluctance to appropriate sufficient long-term portions of some two-thirds of the revenue upon which the state depends during the upcoming biennium.

This makes sense—along with their other major reason—the uncertain fate at the polls in May of the tax-shifting school finance program approved by both Senate and House last week.

Gov. Tom McCall, who conceived and fosters the program that would switch dependence for funds to operate public schools largely from property to income and business taxes, concurs with legislative leadership. And this is important, because under present law only the governor can convene a special—in this case, annual—session of the Legislature.

So a major step has been taken toward yearly appropriating and lawmaking meetings in Salem.

Coincidentally, present House and Senate leadership have proclaimed the current Legislature's standing committees will continue their activities into the interim period between traditional biennial sessions. This is another step toward fulltime lawmaking. Taken together, one can't help but elevate current solons to semi-professional status.

But the clincher on the road to fulltime professionalism in this particular league will be the taste of the so-called big time current members of the Legislature will savor between now and about May 1.

It goes this way. Oregon's biennial sessions purposely are conducted on odd-numbered years and elections are conducted on even-numbered years

This system handily avoids possible conflicts between lawmaking and politicking. Special sessions in the past, for instance, have been called for dates just as far away as the calendar will allow from primary or general elections.

Next year's special session however, tentatively is scheduled to convene something like a month before the '74 primary.

Meanwhile, and more immediately significant, is the special election on the school finance tax plan. Last week marked the first time in Oregon history a legislative body has referred an issue of such magnitude to the voters during a session. And virtually all Oregon lawmakers—-for or against the plan—have committed themselves to campaign on the issue.

Members of the U. S. Congress know all about this situation. They must regularly make the decision whether to stay in Washington and tend to Congressional business or fly home as often as possible to meet political fences. It's said members of the U.S. House of Representatives must campaign constantly throughout their terms of office. And more than one Oregon congressional incumbent has been unseated because he opted to stay in the nation's capital while a newcomer stumped the state successfully.

So for the next month, Oregon Legislators—hard-pressed to give more than passive attention to an unprecedented flood of maybe 2,500 bills—will have to make that "congressional decision."

Do I scoot back home and help explain this tax program, or do I stay in Salem and tend to the business at hand?

It's a tough decision to make. Proponents and opponents alike have logical reasons to work as hard as possible for the measure's passage or defeat at the special election polls.

It's been said this legislature is different than its predecessors and the current problem certainly is another example of the difference.

Though they're not full-fledged big leaguers from a full-

## OREGON TODAY

By Don Willner

Once again the voters of Oregon will have the chance to vote on a major proposal for shifting the burden of taxation. Persons who have recently moved to this state are probably quite puzzled by the forthcoming referendum. In other states the legislature can place the emergency clause on tax measures, which means that the bill goes into effect due to the emergency that has been defined by the legislature. Then if there is initiative provided in the state constitution the voters can collect signatures and try to defeat the next tax plan at the polls after it has been in effect for sometime. But the constitution of Oregon prohibits the legislature putting a tax bill into effect immediately. So the people always have the opportunity of gathering signatures to refer the matter to a popular vote. Knowing that this would probably happen in any event and wanting to hasten the popular vote so that the legislature can make alternative plans if necessary, this tax plan will be voted upon May 1st of this year. If the referendum passes the tax bill becomes law; if it fails the legislature will go back and try to adopt a new proposal.

Over the years many political scientists and other responsible citizens have urged that the provision in the Oregon constitution prohibiting the legislature from placing an emergency clause on tax measures be repealed on the grounds that this would better enable the legislature to meet fiscal crises. The citizens of Oregon have never been willing

to give up their right to vote on tax measures, and so the result is that in this area our state is unique in the amount of popular control. The result has been that most tax measures that have been referred have been defeated. Then, not too long ago with the massive help of students from Oregon colleges, a cigaret tax managed to survive the popular referendum. This gave the sponsors of this 1973 proposal a good deal of hope.

Unlike previous tax measures that have been referred this bill goes to the people with the support of a popular republican governor and a democratic majority of both houses of the legislature. Most of the big business community is opposed, and I imagine that record sums of money will be spent on both sides between now and the first of May. The measure does increase the rates of Oregon income tax and particularly increases the tax burden on good-sized businesses. On the other hand, it will for the first time in memory of any of us provide meaningful property tax relief and will place Oregon's tax system much closer to a true ability-to-pay basis.

Many Oregonians are accustomed to voting no on any referred measure because of uncertainty about its effect. They are thus following the motto of the famous Oregon governor, Oswald West, who said many years ago, "If you don't know, vote no." But this measure will probably have more explanation and more rhetoric on both sides than any other measure in recent years because everyone recognizes that it has a greater chance of passage. After reviewing the evidence the average taxpayer will find that he will be far better off if this tax reform bill passes.

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