

Legislative Report from the Capitol

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In the Oregon State Legislature the change in seasons also brings a change in Leadership. Recent Majority Leader Val Hoyle (D - West Eugene) stepped down to explore a bid for Secretary of State, recently vacated by Kate Brown after the Gubernatorial dominoes fell in February. So, the House Democrats elected Jennifer Williamson from Portland to serve as Majority Leader. Williamson, an attorney who has served two terms and has had a quick rise to power and will be faced with an interesting next couple of years, to say the least.

In something just short of a mutiny, the Senate also changed its Majority Leader. The Democrats elected Sen. Ginny Burdick (D- SW Portland) to replace the long-serving Diane Rosenbaum (D - SE Portland) as Majority Leader. Rosenbaum will become Senate President Pro Tempore, the post that Burdick had held. Burdick is viewed as a more centrist lawmaker, leading some to predict that this change will further moderate the Senate, which is already at odds with the liberal House on major policy issues such as business, labor rights, the environment and transportation.

In addition, House Ways and Means Co-Chair Peter Buckley (D-Ashland) has announced that he will not seek re-election in 2016. The Ways and Means Co-Chairs are regarded as the most powerful legislative positions outside of the Senate President and House Speaker. The Senate Co-Chair Richard Devlin has quietly announced his candidacy, also for Secretary of State, and if he wins that election both co-chair positions would be up at the same time. Drastic changes in the dynamics of the budgeting process and priorities should be expected.

If it's a usual election cycle, we can anticipate that approximately 20 of the 90 House and Senate seats will turn-over due to members retiring, moving on to other public office and occasionally losing their reelection campaign. What's not likely to happen this election cycle, however, is a change in the majority of either legislative chamber. The House Democrats have a comfortable 35-25 majority and may lose a seat or two but not the majority. In the Senate, Democrats hold an 18-12 supermajority and that is not expected to change. Thus, the state's policy discussions should continue to trend blue in 2016.

At this juncture, the Republicans are finding it difficult to recruit viable candidates to challenge swing Legislative seats or, to their dismay, statewide office. Governor Kate Brown does not appear to have drawn any serious challengers - from either party. And while it looks like there could be an interesting campaign in the Democratic primary for Secretary of State, the Republicans will likely be unable to mount serious contenders in that race or the other statewide races for Attorney General and Treasurer. Although, there is rumor that former Republican State Senator Chris Telfer (R- Bend) will consider a run for Treasurer as an Independent.

In similar campaign news, former Republican State Representative Jim Thompson is running as an Independent Party candidate in his former House seat. A moderate Republican from Dallas,

Thompson will join a growing number of candidates who will be running with Independent Party banner. The party, which now has enough registered voters to win major-party status, will be able to participate in the state-financed primary election next May, just as the Democratic and Republican parties already do. It will be interesting to see what impact these candidates have as they try (in most cases) to wrestle seats back from right-wing, tea party candidates who won in the last, mid-term, red tide.

Please feel free to contact us at any time if you have any questions by emailing Bill Cross at bill@wvcross.com or Niki Terzieff at niki@leadingedgepublicaffairs.com.