

## Session Begins in 2015 with Environment and Labor Priorities in the Fore

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With the Democrats looking at significant margins of control in both chambers in the 2015 Oregon Legislative session, environment and labor bills that have failed in the past look for new life. The Democrats picked up one seat in the House this last election cycle and now have a 35-25 majority – just one-vote shy of the super-majority 36 votes it takes to pass a revenue bill. In the Senate, the Democrats picked up two seats and now do have a super-majority with an 18 – 12 split. In the past few sessions, Sen. Betsy Johnson (D-Scappoose) was often the deciding factor in whether or not a bill would pass out of the Senate. A conservative on many social and business issues, she played the one-vote swing but that balance is no longer there with the addition of two more Democrats.

Environmental organizations, labor groups and the trial attorneys – all long-time allies of the Democrats – are reviving a number of issues that didn't make it through the process the past couple of sessions. For example, there should be the votes now for environmental initiatives like the Clean Fuels Program to be extended during the 2015 session otherwise it will face death before ever being implemented. Efforts to increase the state's minimum wage and to require businesses to provide paid sick leave benefits to their employees are on labor's wish list. And, the trial attorneys will revive their class action legislation from last session along with other tort "reform" bills.

There is a lot of interest in improving funding for education, creating more jobs, connecting education and training to skilled, well-paying jobs, strengthening rural economies and investing in critical infrastructure transportation components. Everyone from the Governor to members on both sides of the aisles are focusing on these issues but, again, because of the size of the margins of control in both chambers, the legislative solutions that will be advanced in 2015 will likely be partisan. It's very difficult to temper the expectations of fellow caucus members and their stakeholders when they just went through a bitter campaign and prevailed.

Among other issues confronting legislators will be the implementation of the voter-approved initiative legalizing recreational marijuana. What the Supreme Court decides to do on the PERS reform legislation that was passed two years ago could have an impact on the state's budget which is constitutionally the only requirement of the State Legislature. There will be also talk about tax reform and what that should look like but tax reform to Democrats looks a lot different than tax reform to Republicans!

BOMA's priorities this session include promoting seismic rehabilitation financing options for commercial buildings and property tax assessment exemptions for the value of energy efficiency improvements.

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