



# OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

Representative Jeff Merkley

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## Merkley Lauds Move Toward 21<sup>st</sup> Century Legislature

*SALEM*—Oregon House Speaker Jeff Merkley (D-Portland) today hailed the passage of a resolution that sets strict deadlines on legislative business and calls for a special one-month legislative session to be held in February of 2008. The resolution, SCR 1, passed the House today with broad bipartisan support on a 46-11 vote.

**“The world is a very different place today than it was 148 years ago,”** Merkley said of the constitutionally required biennial session. **“As the pace of economic change and the depth of economic complexity have evolved, the number of legislative issues before this chamber has increased exponentially.”**

The resolution expresses the Legislature’s intent to call itself into a special session early in 2008. Though a permanent move to annual sessions would require a constitutional change approved by Oregon voters, this temporary measure addresses the need for more frequent and predictable legislative sessions. It also allows the legislature to run an experiment with annual sessions before asking the voters to write such a provision into the state constitution.

**“We rarely have an opportunity to test drive measures before they are added to the constitution, so this will be an incredibly valuable experiment,”** Merkley said.

The resolution is the product of a bipartisan, bicameral workgroup of legislative leaders. Originally recommended by the Public Commission on the Oregon Legislature, the negotiations for SCR 1 began under the previous Speaker of the House, Rep. Karen Minnis (R-Wood Village). Merkley took up the issue during his transition into the Speaker’s office and worked closely with Senate President Peter Courtney (D-Salem) to craft the agreement.

**“Our constitution was written at a time when Oregon had a population of 50,000 and a biennial budget of less than \$50,000, so this is a change we have to consider making,”** Merkley said. **“The state of Oregon will benefit from this experiment in building a 21<sup>st</sup> century legislative structure to address the pace and substance of 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges.”**

Oregon is one of only six states whose legislatures do not meet annually.

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