



Providing 24/7 State Police Protection without New Taxes

By Rep. Chuck Burley, Rep. John Dallum, and Rep. Gene Whisnant

Oregonians have expressed their support for around-the-clock Oregon State Police coverage on our highways. Yet, the budget released by top Democratic budget-writers recently does not provide adequate funding to accomplish this goal.

Fortunately, there is a bill to provide dedicated funding for the Oregon State Police. We brought together a group of concerned Republicans and Democrats and wrote House Bill 3535, which permanently dedicates one percent of the General Fund revenue dollars (\$127 million) to a special fund for OSP's Patrol Division. It ensures round-the-clock coverage by putting 140 troopers back on the road to cover major highways, allows for future growth, and does not raise taxes.

HB 3535 is a product of House and Senate Republicans, but it has earned the support of enough Democrats to pass through both chambers. It has also earned the support of the Oregon State Police Officers' Association, the troopers' union. HB 3535 continues to earn support because it's a good solution to a long-term problem.

If we were confident that OSP would be adequately funded in the budget, we would not advocate for dedicated funding. Unfortunately, we see no other way to assure the necessary support of this core function of government. By dedicating one percent of General Fund revenue to the Oregon State Police Patrol Division Fund, the Legislature can begin to restore the trooper positions that have been cut over the past two decades.

Some say OSP needs dedicated revenue from a new tax or a tax increase. With state revenues up \$2 billion over the last biennium, Oregonians expect their government to fund OSP within available means. HB 3535 prioritizes our state spending and eliminates the need for an auto insurance tax.

HB 3535 is similar to competing proposals for dedicated funding, except it doesn't require Oregonians to send more dollars to Salem. Like any dedicated revenue source, General Fund revenue could be re-directed to other uses. Without amending the state constitution, there is nothing binding future lawmakers to spending any dedicated revenue on the OSP.

HB 3535 requires majority votes in the House and Senate to divert revenue away from the Patrol Division. This is a dramatic departure from the past, when OSP was continually de-funded behind closed doors at the State Capitol.

The legislation does not take money away from other programs; instead it firmly establishes the State Police as a top priority for tax dollars. In addition, the dollars are deposited into a secure

state account, separate from the General Fund. All interest earned on the Patrol Division Fund is dedicated to our Troopers.

Oregonians deserve no less than government's full commitment to their safety. HB 3535 gives highways 24/7 protection, without asking taxpayers for more money. It gives the Patrol Division a dedicated funding source and allows the agency to grow as the state grows. Protecting Oregonians is government's most important responsibility, and HB 3535 provides dedicated resources to prove that safety really is the first priority.

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