



Whisnant's Weekly

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Dear Friends,

I am reporting to you from Salem after the first week of the 74th Legislative Session. On Monday, January 8th, 60 members of the House of Representatives were given the oath of office by Oregon Supreme Court Chief Justice Paul De Muniz. Later, the Senators and dignitaries joined us in the House Chamber for the swearing in of the Governor and then we received the Governor's remarks. It was an exciting first day and gives me the hope that we will be able to do the people's work quickly and spend your tax money responsibly. Later, that day the House elected the House leaders and the House Clerk and passed our Rules for the Session. I will be serving as Vice-Chair of the Judiciary Committee, the Education Committee and its Subcommittee on Education Innovation. I remain a member of the State Commission on Children and Families and the Chief Justice's Special Courts Advisory Committee. Within the House Republican Caucus, I serve as the Deputy Whip. As you can see, I have many committees and responsibilities to challenge me this session.

I remain dedicated to helping you with your issues and programs. My staff from last session is returning and we will work hard. Leyla Estes is my Legislative Assistant, Josie Whisnant is working as Administrative Assistant, and Woodie Thomas is my District Liaison.

We'll be sending out "Whisnant's Weekly" on Friday afternoons to keep you informed and up-to-date on issues that are important to you. Please feel free to forward the Weekly to your friends and colleagues, and contact us at any time with any issues or problems and we'll be glad to help. I've updated our contact information in the banner, and let us know if you are in the Salem area and would like to visit.

Sincerely, Gene Whisnant

Committee Work

Judiciary Committee

The Judiciary Committee began with informative hearings on drafting bills. Members of the Oregon Judicial community including the Oregon Supreme Court provided the committee the methodology in their review of appellate cases. This committee will meet five days a week and will handle more bills than any other committee. Next week, I will be speaking testifying before the Judiciary Committee on behalf of the Special Courts Advisory Committee next week.

Education Committee

Our first meeting was held this afternoon. We received a briefing from the Oregon Student Association on their legislative priorities for Higher Education. They will be focusing this session on providing access and lowering tuition costs.

Test for Annual Sessions

The legislature will vote soon on a "test program" to try annual sessions. This concept was recommended by the Public Commission on the Legislature. Although I may support annual sessions with firm deadlines that maintain our citizen legislature, I oppose the proposed legislation which I believe is a violation of the Oregon Constitution. The bill which we are about to vote on uses a constitutional clause to "declare an emergency" to call the Legislature into Session. Usually, this clause is used in the case of a real emergency, but this bill proposes declaring an emergency simply as a scheme to have annual sessions. I believe this is a violation of the intent of the Constitution. I

appreciate the work and time that the Commission devoted to this issue but the Constitution can only be changed by the people, and a "test" may be unconstitutional.

Changing Oregon from biennial sessions to annual sessions is a major change which the people should decide. With annual sessions, we would probably have to have full time legislators and pay them more than the part-time salaries they now receive. I would appreciate your input on this very important Constitutional issue. Please email our office with your comments and suggestions.