

2018 LEGISLATIVE REPORT

OREGON LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION



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“NOT A BAD SESSION...ALL THINGS CONSIDERED”

The Oregon Legislature adjourned on March 3... a week earlier than required by the state constitution. In even-numbered years, the Legislature holds a “short” session which cannot exceed more than 35 days. When the Legislature first enacted annual sessions, the “short” session was intended to address budget adjustments, small tweaks to legislation that was passed during the longer sessions every other year and any emergency issues. However, these “short” sessions have evolved into full-blown sessions with a wide range of policy issues being considered in a very short timeframe.

The 27-day session was considered fairly productive and a little less vitriolic and partisan than the last two short sessions. Democrats, who hold a majority in both chambers, abandoned some of their more progressive agenda items and focused on more incremental policies. Leadership shelved their top agenda item, a cap and trade proposal to charge the state’s largest polluters for their gas emissions, and instead created a joint legislative committee co-chaired by House Speaker Tina Kotek (D-Portland) and Senate President Peter Courtney (D-Salem) to set it up for passage in 2019. Democrats also fell short on a bill to ask voters to make health care a universal right in Oregon

The early part of the session was overshadowed by whether or not Senator Jeff Kruse would resign his position after an investigation had found that he had displayed a pattern of inappropriate touching of women in the Capitol. He eventually announced his resignation and left the Capitol but it created partisan tension. A number of other issues were driven by partisan interests as the short sessions have become opportunities for establishing campaign messaging and voting records for legislative races.

The short session also served as a shadow boxing venue for Brown, who is seeking re-election this fall, and her most prominent GOP challenger, Rep. Knute Buehler of Bend. During the session, Buehler laid out his planks of his campaign platform, such as additional investments in child welfare and taking stronger measures to curb the opioid epidemic in Oregon. Brown responded by asking for \$14.5 million more for child welfare case workers and pushing her own priority opioid measure.

The legislature enacted new policies including tightening gun restrictions on domestic abusers, updating the state’s advance directives statute, requiring more transparency on drug pricing and securing more money for affordable housing. With largely Democratic votes, the legislature approved a bill that disconnected from the recently adopted federal tax cut to prevent Oregon small businesses from taking advantage of a previous Oregon tax concession and a new lower 20

percent federal tax rate. There are rumblings Governor Kate Brown might veto the state tax measure which drew strong opposition from business groups.

Despite the turbulence and political posturing, this year's short session was not so bad...all things considered.

OLCA PRIORITIES

Of the 230 bills introduced during the 2018 session, the OLCA Legislative Committee and advocacy team focused its time on ensuring that landscape contractors didn't get thrown into HB 4144.

Governor Kate Brown requested the bill to be introduced to make it easier for individuals in the construction industry to become licensed, obtain funding to start a sole proprietorship construction contracting business and ultimately to expand the industry workforce and availability of affordable housing.

As passed by the Legislature, HB 4144 waives licensing fees for certain construction contractors, plumbing contractors and electrical contractors. It eliminates the fees and training requirements for residential construction contractor applicants with eight years of specified experience and allows sole proprietor construction contracting businesses to receive financial support in certain circumstances. After working with the House and Senate committee chairs that dealt with HB 4144 and being assured that landscape contractor licensure program would not be part of any amendment discussions, OLCA took no position on the bill.

However, the issue of eliminating the landscape contractor's licensure program or removing the experience and examination requirements to become a licensed contractor will likely be the subject of future discussions as Oregon and other states consider streamlining occupational licensure programs.

This report has been prepared by OLCA's government affairs advocates Bill Cross and Niki Terzieff. Please feel free to contact Bill Cross at bill@wvcross.com or Niki Terzieff at niki@leadingedgepublicaffairs.com.