

Although the 2019 session of the Legislative Assembly ended confrontationally, local Senator Lee Beyer concluded that the session was actually quite successful. Beyer, joined by lobbyist Doug Barber and former legislator Tony Corcoran, pointed to numerous successes in the session when the panel spoke at the Springfield City Club on July 18.

The panel believed that passage of the Student Success Act was a major accomplishment in funding education in Oregon. Beyer said it represents the largest investment in education in Oregon's history. Every legislature since Governor McCall in the 1970s has tried, he said, but none had succeeded.

The Act imposes a business tax, of the same general type as the Washington Business and Occupations tax, at a rate of 0.57% on gross sales in excess of \$10 million. It affects about 15 percent of Oregon businesses, and will generate over \$1 billion in education funding. It offers benefits to all levels of education, including Pre-school and relief nurseries.



Although the bill was vigorously opposed by some industry groups, after the close of the session, manufacturers indicated they would not seek a referral or an initiative to repeal the Act.



The second major success was in the area of health care. As a result of bills passed, 90 percent of Oregonians now have access to health insurance. The hospital tax enacted in 2017 was continued, and new taxes on tobacco have been referred to the November ballot. An attempt to make it difficult for large employers from using Medicaid as their employee health plan did not succeed; our speakers thought the proposal was ill-prepared, and the issue will probably be revisited with an improved version in the 2021 session. The legislature also created a task force to study how to get to single payer health insurance. There is a consensus that such a program would be less expensive, but there would be substantial costs to be funded in any transition.

The legislature also enacted a paid family leave program. Interestingly, one of the conditions for ending the first Senate walkout was an agreement to adopt a bill. This condition was done out of fear that if the legislature failed to act and initiative be proposed which would be “far worse.”

One controversial piece of legislation was the elimination of proof of citizenship requirements for drivers' licenses. A different approach to the issue had been rejected by the voters in the past. The situation has changed since that, however, Sen. Beyer explained. The federal government has enacted “Real ID” requirements under which Oregon drivers' licenses cannot be used for federal ID purposes. In response, the State has adopted new requirements which will result in a different type of license available to citizens beginning in October 2020. Citizens will have to get this new license, at a greater cost, if they wish to use it for federal purposes.

The legislature also referred a constitutional amendment to the 2020 ballot. This amendment would allow the State Legislature to subsequently adopt campaign reforms and funding limits. The Legislature had adopted limits in the past, but they were struck down by the Courts as violative of the current Constitution.



While the panel noted that over 90 percent of legislation approved is on a bi-partisan basis, the major exception that stood out was the failure to adopt a cap and invest package similar to that adopted in California. It was this bill that sparked the second walkout by Republican senators.

Questioners asked if the challenges in the current session were likely to recur in the 2020 session. The panel noted that since the session is sharply time-limited, legislators are given few opportunities to introduce bills, and that the

legislature will have to deal with a tax kicker shortfall, it is quite possible that something like cap and invest, or other highly polarizing issues, might not be on the agenda until 2021.

