

Look for some form of a consumption tax to emerge out of the upcoming session of the Legislature. That was a highlight of the message from State Senator Lee Beyer as he, and Representative-elect Marty Wilde briefed Springfield City Club members on the prospects for the next session, which begins January 22.



Sen. Beyer made it clear – he was not talking about or supporting a retail sales tax. But he did give the sense that there is increased recognition that some form of a consumption tax is an essential “third leg on the stool” for Oregon. Educational funding will be a critical issue the legislature faces this session, and he believes that the Legislature cannot do more with less; some form of additional revenue will be needed.

Education was one of the six issues that he identified as being the focus of the session. Others included PERS, health care, paid

family leave, housing and climate change.

Rep.- elect Wilde pointed to two issues within the health care debate he thought of particular concern. He noted that Oregon is sadly a leading source of diversion of opioids to illegal uses. He and Sen. Beyer agreed that the cost of health care is primarily an issue for the middle class; those who are poor can take advantage of the Oregon Health Plan and those who are wealthy have no issue affording their health care, but those in the middle are forced to use plans with high costs and high deductibles – plans they can not afford to pay for or to use.

The legislator recognized that dealing with climate change must be a collaboration =between environmental interests and industry. Sen. Beyer said he expected some form of “cap and trade” legislation to be approved by the Legislature this session. The primary impact of that legislation is likely to be felt in fuel prices. While both legislators were supportive of efforts to encourage transition away from fossil fueled vehicle, Sen. Beyer noted that although there is movement toward electric vehicles in the rural areas, the challenges of geography were great.

While both legislators were clear about the need for additional funding for education, they noted that the problems are not simple to solve. For example, reductions in class size are generally favored, but the reality is that if class sizes are reduced, there are not enough classrooms in schools to accommodate the students.



One final question from the audience turned to the first program of the month – reapportionment. While both legislators said they could be supportive on an independent commission approach to reapportionment, Sen. Beyer cautioned that such an approach might not solve any problems. The issue, he said, is not intentional gerrymandering, but rather the difficulty of dealing with a geography that has extreme variations in population – which makes creating any set of equal sized districts a great challenge.