

## **AAUW of OR Public Policy Update for 5-2020**

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Hi -

How is everyone doing? It's hard to comprehend the true impact of the pandemic as, unfortunately, it has yet to play out. I just hope you and your family are faring well. Here are our topics today:

### **1. Legislative Update**

#### **2. Initiative Petition 57, A Proposal to Create an Independent Commission the Draws Oregon's Political District Lines - NEED FOR YOUR ACTION ASAP**

#### **3. Civics In Schools - We're Gearing Up**

#### **4. Some Information on the State of Our Economy**

#### **5. Thank you once again to State Senator Tim Knopp (Bend)!!**

### **1. Legislative Update**

You might think that AAUW of OR public policy is in the midst of a lull. It is, and it isn't. There are Zoom Chat meetings a plenty and I'm a Zoom Zombie for sure. On the other hand, it is and will continue to be challenging for us to have a direct impact on the situation. The legislature meets in February, 2021 for its Regular Session, but it is difficult to gauge what appetite there will be for some of our policy priorities, as opposed to state budgetary considerations.

Will there be a Special Session in June, later this summer or even later than that? Will there be one, two or none? I don't believe anyone knows the answer to that question. There are, of course, important considerations that are yet unknown. Will there be additional funding under the proposed HEROES [Health and Economic Recovery Omnibus Emergency Solutions] Act in Congress? If something is passed, how much funding would be authorized, and critically, what would the specific allocation formulas and requirements be? The other, and perhaps most significant, factor is that if a Special Session were called prior to the November election, there is no guarantee that a quorum would be met due to representatives declining to attend. We're still in the same pickle, so to speak, as we were at the end of the 2020 Short Session. There is hope that a bipartisan agreement on pressing issues can be reached, but that seems unlikely at the moment. It is important to remember that there will be 12 new representatives in Salem when the 2021 Session begins in February. That should change the dynamic, although it's not clear how.

### **2. Initiative Petition 57, A Proposal to Create an Independent Commission the Draws Oregon's Political District Lines - NEED FOR YOUR ACTION ASAP**

AAUW of OR is a member of the "People Not Politicians" coalition which seeks to reform how Oregon draws its voting district maps. The reason for our doing so is that we want to ensure that instead of having legislators or incumbent politicians draw our voting maps, we need an independent citizen commission to do so. All voices, whether from urban or rural communities, or from one political party or another, deserve to be heard and have their votes count. Partisan and racial gerrymandering shouldn't be part of our political process. There's more information about Initiative Petition 57 below. However, **we must first get Initiative Petition 57 qualified to**

**be placed on the 2020 ballot.** About 150,000 signatures must be gathered by **July 2nd.** And yes, the COVID-19 situation makes this task even more challenging, but this just underscores how important it is that you take action. The following is what I am asking YOU to do now, but certainly by the end of June:

Your First Step, Completing and Mailing in Your Petition - I have attached a copy of a petition in this email below my signature. You may also have already received one in the mail, but you can use the attached copy, complete and mail it per these instructions. If you have any questions, please contact me or consult <https://www.peoplenotpoliticiansoregon.com/petition-instructions/>. You can also download petitions from this site as well. If you don't have a printer you can request one here: <mailto:sign@peoplenotpoliticiansoregon.com>. The People Not Politicians office will mail you one. Here's the process:

- 1 - Download and print the petition (attached below). I know this sounds overly picky, but it's the rules — you need to use 8 1/2" by 11", white, 20-pound, uncoated paper. That's probably the type of paper that you have in your copier. The back side of the petition also needs to be blank.
2. Sign the petition. PLEASE NOTE: There are TWO signatures that are required on the form — there is a "Request" signature line as you are requesting that IP 57 be on the November 2020 ballot, as well as a "Certification" signature line indicating you are certifying that you have signed the petition.
- 3 - Include the dates of your signatures, both of which should be the same date.
- 4 - Add your mailing address.
- 5 - Signed petitions should be immediately mailed to: People Not Politicians, PO Box 3226, Salem OR 97302.

Your Second Step - Ask your family, friends, and folks you know from other groups to download, print, sign and mail in a petition. You can print and directly distribute petitions to others as well. Needless to say, it would be great if you can obtain more signatures. Here is a 5- and 10-person signature sheet you can obtain by emailing <https://www.peoplenotpoliticiansoregon.com/petition-instructions/>.

You Need Another Step? Here it is - Schedule a webinar or Zoom Chat for your branch or any other group about IP 57 and how to file a petition. Please let me know you want to do this as soon as you can. AAUW of OR and the LWV-OR will provide you all you need or want to know about IP 57, and more!! The League has done an incredible amount of good work on this project and they deserve our thanks — and action!!

What IP 57 Says - You can download the text of IP 57 and other information from <https://www.peoplenotpoliticiansoregon.com>. I'm attaching a more detailed description of IP 57 below. The bottom line is that it is a Constitutional amendment which sets up an independent, citizen-led Citizens Redistricting Commission. The Commission is made up of 12 citizens, none of whom are legislators or public officials. Four of the commissioners are Democrats, 4 are Republicans, and 4 are people who are not affiliated with either party. IP 57 also provides for safeguards ensuring transparency and requirements for obtaining public input.

AAUW of OR In The News: Our support of IP 57 was called out in the May 26th edition of *The Oregonian*, “Campaign Pushes for Citizen Commission to Handle Redistricting.” You will also see our name prominently displayed in the website <https://www.peoplenotpoliticiansoregon.com/>.

Last but not Least, Please Let Me Know What Actions You Have Taken - I look forward to hearing from you and demonstrating that AAUW of OR members are not only interested in, but take action regarding our Public Policy priorities.

### **3. Civics In Schools - We’re Gearing Up**

As many of you know, there is no official civics curriculum that is required to be offered in our K - 12 schools. Your State Public Policy Committee views this as unfortunate at best. Oregon is one of only 14 states where no civics or government coursework is required. The Committee has already embarked on some research into this issue, but it would be exceedingly helpful for us to take a broader look into what school districts throughout Oregon and in other states are doing regarding this issue. If you have any interest in doing some research regarding this issue — and I hope you do — please let me know. You’ll be hearing more from us about it.

### **4. Some Information on the State of Our Economy**

Everyone is wondering about the financial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As you might have anticipated, the news is not good. I listened to Oregon’s Economist Mike McMullen testify before the Senate Interim Committee on Finance and Revenue which met on May 20th. In case you wish to listen to the hearing, here’s the link:

[http://oregon.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=4&clip\\_id=28216](http://oregon.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=4&clip_id=28216).

Here are some of my takeaways:

The Bad News - Not only were we plunged into a severe recession but it took place literally overnight. McMullen reported that while the economic forecast was somewhat better than the one which suggested that agencies were going to be facing 17% cuts across the board, the long-term impact was even more grave than anticipated. Unemployment was estimated to be 20% this year, and 15% next year. Economists estimate that the economy will not recover for another 4 years.

The Impact of our Tax Structure - Our challenges don’t just relate to how much Oregon must budget for spending needs, but we need to look at the revenue side as well. Typically Oregon is subject to increased volatility in revenue because it is reliant on personal income and business taxes, as opposed to, for example, a sales tax. In the last several years the state has adopted some measures to level out this potential for volatility, including the corporate activities tax and taxes on gas, video lottery sales and marijuana. Unfortunately, the pandemic causes reductions in consumer spending in these areas, so our hope for this leveling off is lessened.

Some Good News - There is good news in that Oregon does have a rainy-day fund, which are in fact two funds. There is the Rainy Day Fund and Oregon’s “Budget Stabilization Funds.” The

balance in these funds is healthy — about \$1.6 billion. However, in order to access principal from either of the funds, the legislature must approve them by at least three-fifths of the members of each legislative chamber. There was also \$50 million in general funds that could be allocated for state emergencies by the legislature via the legislature’s Emergency Board (also known as the “E-Board”), of which \$38 million in this biennium’s budget has already been allocated. [When the legislature is in Session, the Joint Committee on Ways and Means has the power to spend state funds, but when the legislature is not in Session, this authority moves to the E-Board, although the amount of funding that can be distributed is limited.]

Note: Some Assumptions - It is important to note that these conclusions are based on the assumptions that over the summer most places will move through Phases 1 and 2, and most businesses will be back in about a year.

The Path Forward, investing in infrastructure - As counter-intuitive as it sounds, Oregon’s economist stated that this is the time that we should be investing in infrastructure. These are the kinds of projects that may have a big upfront cost, but which can also produce critically important long-term benefits. These include investments in transit, rural broadband and/or medical care, resource protection and more. The basic reason for this thinking is that investment costs are so low, i.e. 0%, almost anything pencils out. Aside from this strictly financial analysis, the pandemic has revealed long term, structural inequities in our current socio-economic practices. We need to avoid solely relying on a short-term view that simply tries to fill budgetary holes, but rather we must look to the future and how we can minimize long term damage to all communities.

#### **5. Thank you once again to State Senator Tim Knopp (Bend)!!**

Many of you may remember that Senator Tim Knopp took a leading role in getting the 2017 Equal Pay Act passed. Once again, he deserves our thanks and compliments. You may not have caught it, but Senator Knopp took part in the webinar “State Legislators Roundtable Discussion” sponsored by National AAUW. It’s quite interesting and I highly recommend your taking a look at it: <https://www.aauw.org/resources/events/equity-network/events/>. Not only did he laud Oregon’s mail-in ballot voting system, but quoted President John F. Kennedy in that we shouldn’t be looking for the Democratic or Republican answer, but the right answer. Way to go Senator Knopp!!

#### **Conclusion**

Well, that’s it for now. As you can see from my introductory statements, in one sense Oregon Public Policy seems to be in something of a lull, and yet it isn’t. Please contact me ASAP about your sending in an IP 57 petition and describing how you can disseminate it more widely. Thanks in advance.

Stay safe and healthy!

*Trish Garner*

*State Public Policy Chair, AAUW of OR - Member National Public Policy Committee, AAUW*

