

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Oregon faces many difficult and complex challenges in the coming years. As the policy-making branch of state government, the Oregon Legislative Assembly must address these challenges and become a more efficient, effective institution.

The Public Commission on the Oregon Legislature (PCOL) concludes that many policies and practices prevent the legislature from being fully effective. Moreover, these policies and practices have diminished public respect and confidence in the legislative process; diminished the credibility of the legislature; and discouraged thoughtful and civic-minded individuals from running for and serving in the legislature.

During the course of its discussions and deliberations, the PCOL identified and agreed upon seven major problems facing the Oregon Legislative Assembly. These are:

- **Loss of public confidence** in the legislative process and in the legislature as an institution. For some, the legislature is no longer viewed as a place where an ordinary citizen can “make a difference” for Oregon.
- **Reduction of legislative independence and authority** due to an increase in the influence of state agencies and the lobby, significant consequences of the initiative process, and conditions imposed on states by the federal government.
- **Increasing complexity of the state’s funding obligations** and the attendant legislative tasks stemming from those obligations. Initiative measures and federal rules and laws frequently demand complicated legislative decisions to craft funding and policy solutions that are both difficult to create and to communicate. Measures 5 and 11 are but two examples.
- **Excessive partisanship** at the expense of collaboration and creative problem solving. The public perception is that non-constructive partisanship erodes public faith in the legislature and its ability to find reasonable compromise.
- **Escalating costs of election campaigns** tempt office seekers to put the need to raise money ahead of resolving issues and adds to the perception of undue influence by self interested groups.
- **Decline of the citizen legislature.** Oregon’s proud tradition of a citizen legislature does not coincide with today’s extensive time demands on legislators.
- **Adapting to 21st Century demands for institutional responsiveness.** Advances in technology, changing demographics, and increasing citizen expectations require a thorough understanding of these dramatic changes and an appropriate set of thoughtful responses.

The PCOL believes that the following key recommendations will, if enacted by the 74th Legislative Assembly, increase the credibility and effectiveness of the legislature in the 21st Century. They will address the seven problem policies and practices identified above, and begin rebuilding citizen confidence in the legislature.

The PCOL believes that an effective

LEGISLATOR COMPENSATION

Recommendations

- The Public Officials Compensation Commission (POCC) should be given responsibility for establishing salaries for state elected officials, removing political consideration from that process.
- The commission will set salaries for: the Governor; Secretary of State; State Treasurer; Attorney General; Superintendent of Public Instruction; Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries; Judges of the Supreme Court; Judges of the Court of Appeals; Circuit Court Judges; Tax Court Judges; District Attorneys and Legislators.
- Salaries of elected officials should be based on the duties of the office and at a level that will attract citizens of the highest quality to public service.

Service in the legislature requires personal and professional sacrifices. The Oregon Legislative Assembly meets part-time but has a nearly full-time workload. Attracting citizens with diverse backgrounds and experiences to represent Oregonians in the legislature is difficult. However, it is critical that legislators be of high quality, because the decisions they make affect the lives of every Oregonian.

Compensation should not be the reason for a person to run for legislative office. However, an increase in legislator compensation may help create an environment that attracts high quality citizens from a broad range of backgrounds to participate in the process.

Legislative service should not be perceived as a career, but a calling to public service, and it is important to provide adequate and appropriate compensation for these civic service positions. The public would rather be represented by a citizen legislature than a professional legislative body, and a citizen legislature includes members of diverse ages, employment and financial backgrounds.

Demographic data illustrate how the Legislative Assembly has changed over the past 40 years. In general, there is a decline in the number of early and mid-career (younger) legislators and an increase in the number of late-career or retired (older) legislators. There has been a decrease in the number of legislators involved in agriculture, law, banking and insurance, but an increase in the general category of small business owners and those who identify "legislator" as their primary employment.

The existing Public Officials Compensation Commission (POCC) should be revived with the purpose of establishing salaries for the state's elected officials and to remove political consideration from the process. The POCC should base salaries of elected officials on the duties of their office and to attract citizens of the highest quality to public service.

When establishing legislator compensation, the Public Officials Compensation Commission should take into account the effects of all other possible forms of compensation in recommending legislative salaries, including but not limited to: per diem payments during session and interim; mileage payments during session and interim; and hiring of family members as personal staff. The POCC should develop a salary differential, based on geography, after reviewing the impact on those legislators who must travel long distances or maintain two residences in order to participate in the legislative process in Salem.

Membership of the Public Officials Compensation Commission

It is important that citizens make decisions about the compensation of elected officials. The public should understand what public officials do, what their compensation is and how high quality candidates can be attracted to public service positions.

Following are criteria relating to the Commission:

- To demonstrate their own civic responsibility, all members must have voted in the two General Elections prior to appointment to the Commission.
- The majority of the Commission should be public members selected from voter registration rolls by lottery by the Secretary of State.
- The commission should have 11 or more members, depending on the number of Congressional Districts in Oregon, apportioned as follows:
 - Two members appointed by the Governor, confirmed by the Senate, with background in compensation management;
 - One member appointed by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court;
 - One member appointed by the Speaker of the House of Representatives;
 - One member appointed by the President of the Senate;
 - One member from each Congressional District selected from voter registration rolls by lottery by the Secretary of State; and
 - One member selected from voter registration rolls by lottery by the Secretary of State from the state at-large.
- The Commission should be staffed by the Department of Administrative Services.

Salaries Set by the Public Officials Compensation Commission

The commission shall establish annual salaries for the following elected officers in the Executive, Judicial and Legislative branches of government:

- Governor
- Secretary of State
- State Treasurer
- Attorney General
- Superintendent of Public Instruction
- Commissioner of the Bureau of Labor and Industries
- Chief Judge of the Court of Appeals
- Court of Appeals Judges
- Chief Judge of the Supreme Court
- Supreme Court Judges
- Circuit Court Judges

- Tax Court Judges
- District Attorneys
- Legislative Assembly
 - Members of the Legislature
 - President of the Senate
 - Majority Leader of the Senate
 - Minority Leader of the Senate
 - Speaker of the House of Representatives
 - Majority Leader of the House of Representatives
 - Minority Leader of the House of Representatives

Legislative Action on Salary Recommendations from the Public Officials Compensation Commission

- The Commission should present the salaries to the Governor and Legislature by October 31 of each even-numbered year.
- Subject to appropriation, salary levels should take effect July 1 of odd-numbered years.
- Pursuant to section 1, Article VII (Amended) of the Oregon Constitution, the salaries of the Chief Justice and judges may not be diminished during the term for which they are elected.