



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®
OF OREGON**

The League of Women Voters of Oregon is a 97-year-old grassroots nonpartisan political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. We envision informed Oregonians participating in a fully accessible, responsive, and transparent government to achieve the common good. LWVOR Legislative Action is based on advocacy positions formed through studies and member consensus. The League never supports or opposes any candidate or political party.

April 14, 2017

To: The Joint Committee on Legislative Policy and Research
Senator Peter Courtney, Co-Chair
Representative Tina Kotek, Co-Chair

Re: House and Senate Policy Committees – **Comments/Concerns**

The League is concerned about the role of policy committees in relationship to Ways and Means referrals and decisions. For instance, currently, the House Human Services and Housing Committee has been hearing many housing bills which are referred to Ways and Means. Many of these bills have requests for substantial amounts of money with no apparent limits on the amount of the budget requests. We see this same process in other policy committees and hear from legislators that it is their job to address good policy but don't see their role to consider the cost.

The League supported annual sessions because we wanted the entire 90-member legislature to address budget issues and not just the Emergency Board. Since policy committees are just sending bills to Ways and Means, they are effectively turning over budget decisions to a smaller group of the legislature.

Most Oregon citizens are aware of the budget deficit of 1.6 billion dollars so they must be watching with amazement that bills asking for so much new revenue are passing. We are also concerned that passing these bills sets a public expectation that can't be met without more revenue. These bills transfer a heavy load to the Ways and Means subcommittees who have to make funding decisions with a shortage of funds. What new money is available for these programs? What additional cuts will be taken to fund these programs? Will those cuts actually implement the policy intended when that policy bill was passed? What new revenue has been proposed to fund these programs, make up for agency deficits, and cover program expansions? There seems to be a disconnect between policy and budget.

The Ways and Means subcommittees must be overwhelmed with budget requests that they cannot begin to approve. Prioritization is inevitable but at what level – policy or budget – should prioritization be needed or required? Should policy committees be concerned about funds available or deficient for the purposes of bills approved? Should new programs be denied because no new revenue is approved or not enough tax credits are set to expire? These are big questions for legislators. Help us deal with this dilemma between policy and budget.

Thank you for reviewing our concerns about the current funding situation.

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