

Why I am Running

By Mike Bohan

I have lived in Oregon long enough to watch control of the statehouse cycle from the Democrats to the Republicans and back again to the Democrats. These cycles represent shifting estimations by the electorate as to which party is best able to solve the problems facing the state. Invariably, optimism at the start of each cycle turns to pessimism at the end. Eventually, control reverts to the previous owners with the legislature often times no nearer to solving the state's long-term problems than before.

For example, consider the state's tax structure. Oregon's unique tax structure causes the state's income to fluctuate unpredictably. When times are flush, revenue forecasts trail actual receipts and the state finds itself with unanticipated monies that it must return in the form of kicker checks. When the economy starts to sour, revenue projections tend to over-estimate actual revenues and the state finds itself cutting back on programs just as the demand for those programs increases.

The need to create a permanent rainy day fund seems undeniable. Yet, over several decades, the legislature has been unable to create such a fund independent of which party controlled the statehouse.

Similar problems exist within our educational system – particularly higher education. The long-term economic viability of the state depends upon it having a well-educated workforce. Yet, over the past 25 years, we have decreased higher education support to such an extent that our best and brightest students often find it cheaper to matriculate out of state.

In a global economy, the need for an excellent university system seems obvious. Yet, today Oregon ranks 46th in state funding per student for post-secondary education. Not coincidentally, it ranks 46th in higher-education affordability. These statistics don't provide much basis for optimism that the state can create the type of educated workforce that will attract and retain future high-paying jobs.

A final example is Oregon's transportation infrastructure. We have the ninth most trade-dependent economy in the country. Still, funding for infrastructure has not kept pace with demand. Consequently, the state continues to fall further behind in upkeep of its roads and bridges. This has a real economic cost. For example, it is estimated that by the year 2025 traffic congestion will cost the state 16000 jobs and \$1.7 billion annually. One local example of congestion's impact: Intel has been forced to move its last shipment departure time up 2 hours because of increased evening congestion. For a global company like Intel, missed flights can severely affect operations as well as R & D.

While the importance of infrastructure to a healthy economy cannot be disputed, the legislature has been unable to come up with a funding mechanism that will allow the state to keep pace with its transportation needs.

Without realizing it, Oregon has been making a series of choices that will dramatically affect the quality of life of future generations. Every year that the legislature ignores these problems, they become more intractable. Oregon, once known as a state with innovative solutions to hard problems, today is just as likely to make the news for its short school year and congested roads.

People elected to the legislature often focus on finding quick solutions to pressing problems. As understandable as this is – after all, the next election is only two or 4 years away – it leads to the neglect of long-term issues. Over time, relatively small year-to-year declines can add up to produce major problems.

I am running for this position because I have the knowledge, skills, temperament and perspective to help solve some of these problems.

In my previous career as a systems engineer, I was often called upon to delve into the minutia of complicated systems without losing track of how all those parts and subsystems fit together to work as a whole. Too often, I see legislators investing inordinate amounts of time and energy on legislation that does little to solve the state's most pressing problems. I won't make that mistake.

My high-tech experience also helped me develop leadership and consensus-building skills. I often had responsibility for forming and directing cross-functional interdisciplinary teams. Obtaining consensus in groups composed of highly intelligent – but, headstrong -- engineers is a skill that will serve me well in Salem.

I am not just experienced in the impersonal world of high-tech, though. My experience as a teacher has helped me see the more human side of the state's successes and failures. I have gained a deep respect for the dedication of my teaching colleagues. Based on my personal observations, I am optimistic about the future of education in Washington County.

As a long-time political activist, I have forged working relationships with many state legislators and other office holders, allowing me to be able to hit the ground running if appointed. My contacts include not just Washington County legislators, but political leaders from across the state. In addition, my recent run for the legislature gives me a leg up on understanding many of the issues facing the legislature.

Finally, as a father I am deeply cognizant of the obligation my generation has to leave the world a better place for the next generation. From a selfish point of view, I don't want my son to have any reason to move out of the state when he's old enough to be on his own. I'd like to keep him as close as possible.

It is for these and many other reasons that I am running for this position. I look forward to meeting with you on Tuesday and answering any questions you might have.

Thank you for your kind consideration.

Sincerely,

Michael J. Bohan