

BEN WESTLUND

FOR GOVERNOR



MEDIA RELEASE

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OREGON SENATOR DROPS PARTY AFFILIATION AND LAUNCHES GUBERNATORIAL BID

BEND, Ore. (February 14, 2006) – Oregon Senator Ben Westlund (I-Bend) announced on Tuesday that he plans to seek the people’s nomination for Governor by gathering signatures to run as an independent. To qualify for the ballot, he must submit just over 18,000 valid signatures by the end of August 2006.

“I have re-registered and am not a member of a party, not because I think Republicans or Democrats are bad, but because I feel that extreme partisanship is keeping us from solving Oregon’s most pressing problems and the party label was keeping me from truly being able to provide leadership on the issues Oregonians care about.”

A successful small businessman, Westlund has served as a Republican in the state legislature since 1997, and was elected first as state representative from rural Central Oregon. Westlund was appointed in the final days of the 2004 session to fill a vacancy in the Senate and was elected to the seat in November 2004, receiving both the Democrat and Republican nominations and over 80% of the votes cast.

Westlund’s politics defy party labels. He came under fire last session with a threatened recall for his sponsorship of SB1000, which would have made it illegal to discriminate against gays and lesbians and allowed civil unions for same-sex couples in the state. Westlund is a strong advocate for reducing health care costs for individuals and businesses and believes that primary and preventative healthcare is a fundamental right. He is a champion of reforming Oregon’s tax structure which is heavily dependent on the income tax. He received a 100% rating from AG-PAC for his efforts on behalf of farmers and ranchers and the Oregon League of Conservation Voters’, an environmental organization named him “Best Consensus Builder” of 2005.

“Ask any Oregonian to describe themselves and very few will list party first, second or even third. We register to vote as Republicans, Democrats, Greens, Libertarians or no party at all -- but that does not define us. We are all Oregonians first and we all should be working together to make Oregon a better place.”

Based on that conviction, Westlund aided in the creation of the Oregon Open Primary Initiative which aims to open Oregon’s primaries to all voters. “We have a closed primary system that excludes independent voters and elects the most democratic Democrats and the most republican Republicans and then we send them all to Salem and wonder why they can’t get along. It’s time we return to the Oregon way of getting things done: putting ideas before ideology and people before politics.”

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Westlund is the former co-chair of the budget writing Ways and Means Committee and has earned a reputation for understanding complex issues and for developing relationships on both sides of the aisle. He says voters find his solutions-oriented approach refreshing, and media coverage about his potential candidacy has generated emails, letters and calls of support. In August, *The Oregonian*, the statewide newspaper, suggested that he throw his hat into the ring calling him “the nearest facsimile in Oregon politics to the mythical beast that independent voters often tell pollsters they are looking for: a pro-education, pro-business moderate willing to buck his party.” *The Statesman Journal* editorialized that Ben is “the ideal candidate” while *the Source*, Central Oregon’s independent weekly, editorialized on “Why Ben Should Run,” explaining, “His record is that of a lawmaker who’s able to work both sides of the aisle to forge consensus. He’s also proven that he’s guided by principle rather than party loyalty or dogmatic ideology.”

A lung cancer survivor, Westlund brought many in the capitol to tears in June 2003 when he delivered his “return from the hospital” speech on the floor of the Oregon State House where he called on his colleagues to put aside partisanship and “stop being politicians who think only of the next election and start being statesmen who think only of the next generation.”

Upon recovery, he became a tireless advocate for health care, traveling the state to promote innovative solutions to the severe health care crisis facing the state. Last session he sponsored legislation to save businesses money by allowing them to pool their prescription drug costs, and was a chief sponsor of expanding insurance equity to the mentally ill. But still, he believes not enough was done to address the “health care crises of moral and economic proportions.”

For the first time, Westlund has turned to the initiative process to take some of these issues before the people. “When the Legislature fails to act, fails to address the critical problems facing the future...it’s up to the people to step forward and offer solutions.”

He is currently touting his HOPE for Oregon Families initiative, which makes access to primary and preventative health care a basic right of all Oregonians and directs the Legislature to increase health care access in the state. He is also sponsoring the Children’s Wellness Act initiative, which ensures access to basic health care to all Oregon children and provides subsidies to small employers to cover many of their uninsured workers.

Westlund also worked last session to decrease our dependency on foreign oil by expanding solar tax credits. He was disappointed that partisan gridlock prevented the passage of a biofuels package and has since signed on to an initiative with former Governor John Kitzhaber (D) to increase biofuel production and renewable energy projects across Oregon.

“I’m hopeful about the future of Oregon. As I talk with Oregonians around the state, I’m encouraged by the support I’m seeing. Every day people, from both sides of the aisle are asking me to run for Governor, not as a member of a party, but as an Oregonian. Oregonians may not agree with me 100% on every issue but they want leaders who are courageous about important issues like health care and fair taxes. They’re ready for solutions and they appreciate that I’m actually offering some.”

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