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**PETITIONS FOR WESTLUND INDEPENDENT GUBERNATORIAL BID ONLINE
WWW.WESTLUNDFORGVERNOR.COM**

BEND, Ore. (February 17, 2006) – The petition sheets to place Oregon Senator Ben Westlund (I) on the November ballot for Governor are available now on his website at www.westlundforgovernor.com and by calling the campaign. In order to qualify as an independent, he must submit just over 18,000 valid signatures to the Secretary of State by the end of August 2006.

“I am encouraging all Oregonians who just aren’t satisfied to declare their independence and sign my petition,” said Westlund, who dropped party affiliation Tuesday.

Confusion over a new law about whose signatures may be counted may make it more expensive for Westlund to get the signatures. The Westlund website addresses this issue, “Democrats and Republicans can sign the petition. If they later vote in the primary election, their signature will not count towards the total... but if they’re supportive of Ben, get their signature anyway.”

Campaign manager, Stacey Dycus said voters who later vote in their party's primary will be removed before signatures are submitted: “We are not going to limit the free speech of voters who may or may not participate in a party primary by preventing them from signing now. It’s customary for a campaign to verify signatures before submission. We will just have one more thing to check.”

If website response is any indication, it looks like Westlund is off to a good start. In the first three days of his campaign, over 100 volunteers registered to help gather signatures. The website also features videos of Westlund speeches, media clips and stances.

A successful small businessman, Westlund has served in the state legislature since 1997, and was elected first as state representative from rural Central Oregon. As the former co-chair of the budget writing Ways and Means Committee, Westlund has earned a reputation for understanding complex issues and for developing relationships on both sides of the aisle. 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 start being statesmen who put the next generation before their next election.

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.”

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. 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. Westlund also aided in the creation of the Oregon Open Primary Initiative which aims to open Oregon's primaries to all voters.

Ben Westlund's campaign for Governor can be reached at 541-382-8481 or on the web at www.westlundforgovernor.com

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