

## BEN WESTUND'S ANNOUNCEMENT OF CANDIDACY FOR OREGON GOVERNOR

FEBRUARY 14, 2006

As we stand here on Oregon's 147<sup>th</sup> birthday and think about the founding of our great state, full of promise and potential, it causes me to reflect on my own start in public service.

I remember it like it was yesterday, though it was 9 years ago on the morning of what was to be my first day in the legislature. Libby, the children and I had spent the night in sleeping bags, on the floor, of my not so palatial Salem apartment. We were crowded cramped, frustrated and excited—I, the most. Ecstatic about being sworn in as an Oregon state representative; happy mom would be there...sad dad couldn't.

We were all just leaving...walking out the door I have walked out so many times since...when my 4-year-old daughter Taylor asked me (and this is a quote), "Daddy? What are you going to do as a State Representative?"

Luckily, I was smart enough to realize that what she was really asking was: Daddy, why do you have to leave home? I knelt down, looked right at her and replied, "I'm going to help the little schoolchildren learn to read, help the sick get well, throw the bad guys in jail, and help people as old as grandma live out their lives in comfort." To this day I have yet to come up with a better answer as to why I serve.

But every day since, in spite of my and many others' best efforts, I become increasingly frustrated as Oregon, our Oregon, Taylor's Oregon, spirals into mediocrity and below.

Not so long ago, Oregon had the highest rates of literacy, home ownership and number of insured. No longer.

Now, over 600,000 of our citizens don't have health insurance, and over 10,000 Oregon children go to bed hungry each night. We have one of the shortest school years in the nation, and home prices are outpacing wages.

How did we get here? How did we fall from a state that was considered first among equals to one that's been panned in Doonesbury and approaches being the Appalachia of the Northwest?

We are where we are – mired in mediocrity – because extreme partisan politics all too often trumps good public policy.

Don't get me wrong. I think parties have a noble heritage and place in politics:

- They articulate important issues;
- They get voters involved;

- They find and train candidates, and
- They support them through the elections.

But once the voters have spoken - that elected official has a responsibility to represent their constituency as whole, not simply the party and special interests that elected them.

Our leaders will fail time and time again to solve real problems for real Oregonians, when those problems take a backseat to the partisan priorities of the next election, and then the next, and the next...

Unfortunately, it has become standard operating procedure for both parties to posture and preen, all for the single-minded purpose of gaining control of the chambers, statewide offices, and the governorship.

And when they do gain that power & control, they are so afraid of losing it that they fail to exercise courage & the responsibility of their majority by leading.

The original intent of our two party system has been lost in Oregon, and critical issues are going unaddressed by good minds for the common good.

Take healthcare, a crises of immeasurable economic and moral proportions: what was done last session to make it more affordable? To provide access for those that don't have it? And just as importantly: lower costs for those that do—what was done? Not enough.

And what about our tax structure: the most volatile in the nation...that depends too heavily on income taxes paid by hard working Oregonians? It stifles job creation, disincentivizes capital investment, and puts our schools, public safety and vital safety net services in jeopardy every single session. Did we have the courage to even discuss it? Of course not. The topic was taboo.

And the renewable energy package that we lost in the last hours of the session? Sacrificing sustainability, jobs and our chance to decrease our dependence on foreign oil? Another opportunity lost.

**Oregon's future can no longer afford to be held hostage in the frontlines of partisan politics. Our citizens deserve better, and Oregon deserves better.**

**Oregon deserves the best and brightest, regardless of party affiliation, working on the critical problems facing us. But partisanship** makes it difficult to negotiate, to compromise or to form the coalitions so vital to getting things done.

**Paralyzing partisanship is keeping us from the challenges of our day and forcing us to pass on the increasingly complex problems to our children's tomorrow**

**I can't stand for that, and I hope you can't either.**

**But I am hopeful—hopeful that we can restore Oregon to her former self...a shining example to the nation on so many innovative fronts.**

**Where do I find my hope, when Oregon seems headed down such a wrong path? My hope comes from a growing number of common sense Oregonians who aren't satisfied with an Oregon going downhill and who will work to avert our continuing slide into mediocrity. My hope comes from Oregonians committed to their communities...from Oregonians committed enough to care.**

Ask any Oregonian to describe themselves, and very few will list party first, second or even third.

No label can accurately describe the depth of our emotion, the complexity of our opinions, the strength of our values, **the independence of the human spirit**

**A few letters after our name do not represent us as people, nor do they represent Oregon well.**

**We are nothing if not Oregonians first.**

We must bridge these partisan divisions.

That's why I am running for Governor as an independent.

As a legislator, I have earned a reputation as someone who forms coalitions and works for consensus

As an independent Governor, I will bring together the good men and women from all parties and all affiliations to work on the critical issues facing all Oregonians.

Surely, all Oregonians agree that a great state must have:

- A rigorous and relevant education system;
- A business climate that provides good paying jobs and incents innovation,;
- Responsible stewardship of our lands to provide recreation, safe drinking water and clean air;
- A health care system that is affordable to everyone; and
- A state that honors the human dignity and worth of all of it's citizens

It is time...

- To put ideas before ideology.
- To put people before party.
- It is time to put Oregon first.
- It is time to declare our independence.
- It is time to elect an independent Governor for Oregon.