

Oregon Republicans in the House and Senate put out their agendas for the 2023 legislative session this month. Why do you need to know what they want even though little of it will be enacted since Democrats are still the majority in the House and Senate? Because some of it is designed to clog up the system so at least they'll get a little attention, which seems to be part of the Republican agenda on all levels these days.

House and Senate Republicans want to prioritize "fiscal responsibility." Translated, that means lower taxes. The Senate wants to lower taxes as well but they are more subtle about it.

Since it's fashionable these days to address housing and homelessness, House Republicans say they are going to do this by cutting regulations and permitting red tape. They have always wanted to cut regulations and red tape, so now is their chance to do this out of "concern" for the homeless. They also want to get rid of inflation by, guess what, reducing taxes.

The Republican House's Agenda is a prelude to the Republican Senate's, which they call "Equitable Oregon." But is it equitable? While it does contain some provisions Democrats could go along with, such as supporting housing development and helping homeless students access education, there is no category for racial or LGBTQ equity in their priority list. Rather it seems to define "Equitable" as urban/rural equity or tax equity for Oregon's beleaguered rich.

Basically, Oregon Republicans want no part of gun safety laws in any form, since their first priority under "Reducing Violent Crime" is to support Oregonians Second Amendment Rights. Republicans apparently believe if we all run around with guns strapped to our bodies, crime will go down. They also want to bring back jail time for anyone found with a controlled substance that is no longer controlled, create a few more crimes and toughen up sentencing.

Of course they want to reduce taxes. They're Republicans. Equitable Oregon proposes that every household get a "kicker" check of \$5,200 this year instead of just a tax deduction. Oregon's Kicker law says when revenues are higher than predicted Oregon taxpayers get some of that back in the form of a tax credit. Republicans want to see that returned in the form of a check signed "Your Friendly Republican Party."

Republican Senators also want to freeze property taxes for people older than 67 (some of whom are the wealthiest people in Oregon), then watch all those people register as Republicans when Democrats don't go along with this. They want to raise the threshold for having to pay the Corporate Activity Tax to \$5 million (currently it's \$1 million) and want more exemptions on the estate tax to allow people to "take it with them" when they die. Republican Senators also threw in a proposal to require the federal government to operate under a balanced budget, as if anyone in the federal government cares what Oregon Republicans think. Oregon House Republicans also include their standard line about monitoring government for wasteful spending.

On Housing and Homelessness Republican Senators got some of their ideas from Democrats, such as increasing housing development and providing more funding for mental health. However they also want to recriminalize drugs and sneak in some clever ways to lower taxes by giving people who rent rooms a tax break as well as providing renters with a tax break just for paying their rent.

Republican Senators put a Freedom and Prosperity section into their agenda that reduces a governor's freedom. Their proposals limit the governor's pardoning power, make it easier to impeach a governor, limits the duration of an emergency declaration and "protects free and fair elections" a euphemism for getting rid of mail-in balloting.

Regarding Education, Republicans want to increase public charter schools, require school districts to post their curriculum on their websites, reduce credentialing requirements for teaching technical classes and allow students to attend schools outside their districts. They didn't put anything in about giving taxpayer money to private schools but you know they have a loophole for that somewhere. They did allow for a pilot program to provide funding to school districts to improve access to schools by homeless students and mention providing statewide equity initiatives for minorities but LGBTQ students are conspicuously left out while Democrats say this, "We will stand up to threats against Oregon's BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Jewish and other religious minority communities, and Oregonians with disabilities."

Republican senators don't say they want to protect the environment, but they do have a section called Protecting Oregon's Farms, Fisheries and Forests, mostly the forests as there was no mention of farms or fisheries in that provision. They want to make sure the state Forester maintains low fuel load levels on state lands while eliminating the requirement that the Forestry Department oversee the development of a statewide map of wildfire risk. Republicans really hated that wildfire risk assessment map. They also want to get federal agencies to keep their lands cleaned up in Oregon but really have no power to do that. On offshore wind energy, they believe if communities have to look at the windmills from their beaches they should get the energy. They also believe they can reduce Oregon's carbon footprint by encouraging people to buy Oregon made and grown products but want to protect gas stoves from being eliminated from future construction. House Republicans do include "safeguarding water for multiple uses" in their agenda, which is a nod to farmers.

So how does this make Oregon more equitable or help people out in rural areas who constantly complain the state doesn't consider their needs? House Republicans did throw in a sentence saying they want to "ensure legislation will benefit all Oregonians, not just Portland." However, neither the House or Senate Republican agendas address medical care, one of rural Eastern Oregon's biggest concerns while the House Democrats' 2023 agenda does and includes reproductive health as well. Republicans emphasize crime and homelessness, which aren't a big priority in the outback and other than making allowances for a garage mechanic to teach high school kids how to change the oil in their cars (which mostly happens at home in rural areas anyway), it's educational "improvements" are not all applicable in very rural communities that desperately need updated facilities and qualified teachers and administrators. Democrats' agenda recognizes the challenges schools have had in recent years and says outside forces such as lack of housing and workforce retention affect schools as well as communities.

So pay attention to the statehouse Republicans this year, who mostly represent the rural areas of Oregon, to see if they really are concerned about their constituents or just want to harass the Democrats.