

Portland Business Journal - December 17, 2007
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PORTLAND BUSINESS JOURNAL

Friday, December 14, 2007

Deckert eyes smooth switch from politics to business

Ex-legislator now leads the Oregon Business Association

Portland Business Journal - by Andy Giegerich Business Journal staff writer

Shortly after assuming the **Oregon Business Association's** helm this fall, Ryan Deckert spent an eye-opening meeting with business lobbyists from Louisiana.

"They didn't know about green energy initiatives or how the initiatives benefit business," Deckert said. "Sustainability isn't woven into their fabric. And they don't really partner with their state government other than when they're both fighting for federal dollars."

It's the exact opposite of how Oregon businesses deal with their elected leaders, a rank from which Deckert was plucked to lead the influential Beaverton-based OBA. In succeeding Lynn Lundquist as OBA's president, Deckert hopes to continue molding the group into a model for other business organizations nationally.

Specifically, the group will work collaboratively with elected officials as opposed to defensively opposing measures proposed by others. OBA used the collaborative strategy often during the 2007 session and convinced lawmakers, as well as some of its more conservative members, that the state should devote excess corporate kicker money into a rainy-day savings fund.

OBA achieved many of its objectives last session by working well with lawmakers of all political persuasions. Deckert should continue the practice: During his 11-year Oregon legislative stint, he backed a cadre of Democratic issues that earned him backing from the Oregon **AFL-CIO** and other progressive groups. As chairman of the Senate's Revenue Committee, he also lent a sympathetic ear toward business concerns.

"I don't see business issues as partisan," said Deckert. "They have substance to them. Even when we talk about transportation, businesspeople might be interested to hear what it would take to raise the gas tax to build some roads."

To spread OBA's word and flex its public policy chops, at least four lobbyists will begin spending time in Salem. Until the 2007 session, only Lundquist made regular Capitol treks.

"I think Ryan brings a lot of energy and enthusiasm to the position," said Lundquist, the



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Former state Sen. Ryan Deckert will use his legislative experience to promote the OBA's agenda.

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former House Speaker who helped choose his OBA replacement. "He'll work towards policies that benefit Oregon, even if those pieces are somewhat difficult to implement. I think he shares the vision of OBA, which is critical."

Others say Deckert should make a smooth switch to the other side of the legislative fence.

"With groups like Hanna Anderson, which does children's clothes, and PGE, it'll be a little bit like herding cats," said Jim Craven, a longtime **American Electronics Association Oregon** lobbyist. "It's not a unique challenge for Ryan Deckert, but he's well-positioned right now. He's a Democrat, but not an ideological Democrat, and that's what the [Capitol] is right now. That won't hurt him at all."

Deckert inherits a group that's seen its revenue lately grow, reaching \$334,000 in 2006. The group will eventually employ six full-time staffers who'll help its revenue grow between 20 percent and 25 percent in 2008.

Deckert will likely collect a raise: As a full-time senator, he earned \$1,534 a month. Lundquist earned \$104,000 in 2006.

To earn his keep, Deckert hopes to achieve several goals during the next two years:

- Like his former legislative colleagues, he'll tout several transportation initiatives, including finding money for a new Columbia River crossing. As lawmakers determine where to find the funds, Deckert wants them to seek green solutions. The projects should occur in the context of reducing carbon emissions, he said.

"If we're going to invest, say, \$1 billion toward these projects, we need to do little things to make the projects carbon neutral," Deckert said. "We hope the state will favor that approach through incentives."

- Along the same lines, OBA will espouse a high-speed railroad that connects Portland and Seattle. Such a project would require a pricey set of tracks but would allow Portland and Seattle companies to better work in tandem, a longtime Oregon business community aim.
- Deckert is also working on what he called "a big engineering initiative" with, among others, Portland-based Tripwire Inc. CEO Jim Johnson. Details of the project are being finalized.

"Portland should become a mecca for competitive companies, whether it's in green building, where we're the epicenter, or producers of semiconductors or medical devices," Deckert said. "All of these folks rely on engineers."

- OBA will also encourage lawmakers to develop "future budgets" that address state needs a decade or so in advance. The move could help lure businesses that, upon seeing Oregon's commitment to funding projects several years ahead of time, could establish stronger presences here.

Deckert will also continue his Oregon Innovation Council work, moving from his role as the business development outfit's legislative liaison to become a full-fledged council member.

Such activity has the buy-in from OBA's board of directors, which includes such heavyweights

as **Nike Inc.**'s Julia Brim-Edwards, **Neil Kelly Co.**'s Tom Kelly and Gard Communications' Brian Gard.

Senate President Peter Courtney said Deckert, who entered the Oregon House at age 24, quickly became one of Salem's most agile financial experts.

"He's the finest revenue mind I've ever been around," said Courtney. "He became very expert in that area, and he's one of the best chairs I've ever been around as well.

"He's a player, a real player, and you don't replace him very easily at all."

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