

## OREGON POLITICS

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For much of its history, Oregon has enjoyed a national reputation for innovation in its public policies and politics. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Oregon was one of the leaders in the Progressive Movement, championing such reforms as the initiative and referendum, the recall of public officials, the direct primary, the direct election of U.S. senators, and women's suffrage.

During the more modern era –1970-2000 -- Oregon's notable achievements included asserting public control over ocean beaches; the bottle bill; the imposition of strict, state-wide land-use planning laws; the creation of the nation's most powerful regional government (Metro); the passage of the Oregon Health Plan; and the enactment of Vote by Mail. So enamored were national journalists about Oregon's many achievements during this period that some went so far as to dub the state as the place "Where the Future Works."

Yet in recent years, the word "innovative" hardly seems the best adjective to describe Oregon's politics. Better terms would be "conflicted" and "divisive" as Oregon has found itself repeatedly immersed in conflicts – often waged via high profile ballot measures – involving a wide range of public policy concerns, from social issues (abortion, physician assisted suicide and gay rights) and environmental concerns (land-use planning and hunting policy) to criminal justice (mandatory minimum sentences and the death penalty) and tax policy (cutting property and income taxes).

Throw in several economic downturns – and ensuing state "budget crises" – and Oregon in recent years has increasingly been likely to get headlines for other reasons - e.g, for its high unemployment rate, its short school year, its #1 ranking in citizens' "food insecurity," and its volatile revenue system (to name just a few).

Is Oregon a fundamentally different place than it was a generation or two ago? Or, have these dual strains – of innovation and division, progress and regression – always been part of our state's make up? Why is there so much conflict in the state over public policy? What is the nature and character of this conflict? What effect has it had on Oregon – and what effect might it likely have in coming years?

This course will explore these and other related questions as it provides a historic and contemporary look at major themes and trends in Oregon's politics. While mostly focusing on politics at the state level, the course will also look at the structure and key roles played by the federal government and local governments (cities, counties, school districts, and other special districts).