

SCR 10 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Rules

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Meeting Dates: 3/17

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

The measure honors the life and memory of Peter Courtney, who lived from 1934 to 2024.

Fiscal impact: No impact

Revenue impact: No impact

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

Peter Courtney was born June 18, 1943, in Philadelphia. He was raised in West Virginia, where he played multiple sports in high school, earned his bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of Rhode Island, and a juris doctorate from the Boston University School of Law. He passed away on July 16, 2024, at his home in Salem, Oregon.

Peter came to Oregon in July 1969 as a law clerk for Judge William S. Fort of the newly formed Oregon Court of Appeals. He lived for two years in a room at the Salem YMCA and became a huge supporter of its programs.

Peter and his wife, Margie Brenden, were married for 48 years and raised their three sons in their north Salem home along the Willamette River. He loved watching them play sports, attend college, and become fathers. He was grandfather to eight grandchildren. He also loved animals, especially his dachshunds.

Peter's first political office was that of Salem City Councilor, from 1974 to 1980. He was subsequently elected in 1980 to seven terms in the Oregon House of Representatives, serving as House Democratic leader for eight years. He was then elected to the Senate in 1998, serving six terms, and became the Senate President in 2003. He was the longest-serving legislator and longest-tenured Senate President in Oregon's history, leading the chamber for 20 years. He was a servant leader and a proud lifelong Democrat who promoted bipartisan cooperation and often spoke about respecting other viewpoints and the power of compromise.

Peter was a champion for children, animal rights, earthquake preparedness, victims' rights and services, and mental health, and he sponsored more than two hundred bills that became law, including Oregon's first vote-by-mail legislation in 1981. His legislative efforts led to earthquake improvements to over 450 critical public buildings, including schools, fire stations, hospitals, 911 call centers and the Oregon State Capitol building.

Peter was a driving force in the construction of a new state mental health hospital, which opened in 2013. At his urging, a memorial was created adjacent to the hospital to honor over 3,500 patients whose cremains were stored in copper canisters on the site. The hospital and surrounding grounds were dedicated as the Peter Courtney Salem Campus of the Oregon State Hospital.

Peter worked for 30 years as an administrator and instructor at Western Oregon University (WOU) and was a champion of both education and physical fitness, and WOU dedicated the Peter Courtney Health and Wellness Center in Peter's honor in 2015.

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Throughout his career, Peter regularly exercised in the Salem YMCA and secured state funding to help pay for the construction of a new YMCA facility on the same downtown Salem site where he once lived, and the new veterans' housing apartment building at the Y is named Courtney Place.

Peter coached basketball at the Salem Boys and Girls Club where he enthusiastically believed in the children's potential to win at sports and in life. He loved, and was beloved, in his adopted hometown of Salem, and the city named the bridge linking Riverfront Park and Minto-Brown Island Park the Peter Courtney Minto Island Bridge.

Peter loved sports, the Oregon State Fair, the Oregon state flag and Oregon high school mascots. He ran in the iconic Hood to Coast Relay 20 times, and appeared in the 2011 documentary Running Forward: Conquering Oregon's Hood to Coast Relay. He also enjoyed spending time with his family camping on the Snake and Metolius rivers, and visiting the Oregon coast. He loved the excitement of jet skiing on the Willamette River and the calm and peaceful moments enjoying coffee and cinnamon rolls with Margie.

Peter dedicated his life in service to Oregon, often referring to his beloved state as "Oregon, My Oregon." At every point over his six decades as an Oregon public servant, he lived up to his slogan "Here to Serve. Nobody Works Harder."

Senate President Peter Courtney will forever be remembered as a dedicated leader, and his work ethic and bipartisan spirit will be upheld as an aspiration for members of the Legislative Assembly. His compassion and concern for the people of Oregon will forever be seen as a model for a life of public service and for what can be achieved in service to the public.