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Bipartisan Oregon Investment Act will make economic development nimbler, help more companies thrive

Multifaceted reform legislation responds to business and investment needs across the state

SALEM – State Treasurer Ted Wheeler, legislators, the governor’s staff and state economic development officials crisscrossed the state during the past six months to listen to business and community leaders.

The key question: How can Oregon better help to stimulate the economy and create jobs?

That input – and there were hundreds of stories and suggestions -- helped to craft a multifaceted reform plan. The new bipartisan blueprint, called the Oregon Investment Act, is a keystone in the state’s effort to build a stronger foundation for job creation.

The bill will be introduced in the 2012 Legislature and has, to date, 37 legislative sponsors and cosponsors, as well as the support of Gov. John Kitzhaber. The chief sponsors are state Rep. Tobias Read, D-Beaverton; Rep. Vicki Berger, R-Salem; Sen. Chris Telfer, R-Bend; and Sen. Richard Devlin, D-Tualatin.

The Act will better coordinate how Oregon invests in business opportunities and allow the state to react more quickly and to better prioritize public resources. In addition, the legislation will open the door to additional private sector investments in Oregon companies, which will help to address a capital gap facing both new and established companies.

“As we continue to strengthen Oregon’s economy, it is imperative that we have a tool that can take advantage of our limited public resources to leverage significant private investment into our economy and get our businesses the resources they need to grow,” said Governor Kitzhaber.

“Opportunities only become competitive advantages when you invest in them,” said Treasurer Wheeler. “The Oregon Investment Act will make our economic development efforts smarter and more nimble, which will help create jobs and make businesses across Oregon more competitive.”

The Act has three overarching goals:

- **Increase the money to invest in Oregon opportunities – and create jobs --** by targeting and leveraging public resources such as the Lottery to attract substantial investments from the private sector.

- Make Oregon’s economic development efforts **smarter, more nimble and more streamlined**, because decisions and priorities about how and where to invest would be made by a panel of experts with private sector expertise, as opposed to disparate entities or agencies.
- **Invest public money wisely.** The Act would facilitate better reporting of the results Oregon is getting for its economic development investments, to help ensure the public is getting the best value. Also, taxpayers do not need a scattershot of economic development boards.

“Through the Oregon Investment Act, business and government can come together to be a catalyst for growth, which will build and strengthen Oregon’s economy both today and for the long run,” said Rep. Tobias Read, D-Beaverton.

“This Act will help Oregon move its scarce financial resources to the places that can make the most difference, in large and small amounts, and to do it quickly but carefully,” said Rep. Cliff Bentz, R-Ontario. “This money must be invested so it returns to taxpayers the most possible for each dollar invested.”

“Keeping Oregon investment dollars in Oregon and investing in Oregon businesses and jobs is a great return on our investment,” said Sen. Chris Telfer, R-Bend.

“To create the jobs of tomorrow, we must create a better business development model today,” said Sen. Richard Devlin, D-Tualatin. “The Oregon Investment Act responds to the needs of job creators, whether they are new startup firms or established companies that want to hire and grow.”

Currently, Oregon’s tools for job creation are spread across multiple agencies and have sometimes little strategic connection. Under the legislation, those resources would be catalogued and coordinated by a new Oregon Growth Board, which would have broad authority to prioritize and help guide the use of economic development funds.

The 10-member panel will collaborate with local organizations and the private sector to identify business needs, and react quickly to them. The board also would look for opportunities to work alongside the private sector to boost investment in economic development.

It is important to note that the Oregon Investment Act restructures government, rather than adding to it. Plans call for streamlining and consolidating existing programs. The Oregon Growth Account Board, which invests Lottery proceeds in startups, would be folded in to the new entity.

Details about the legislation can be found at www.oregoninvestmentact.org.

The State Treasury protects public assets and saves Oregonians money through its investment, banking, and debt management functions. The office also promotes public outreach and education to help Oregonians learn strategies to save money, invest for college and make smart financial choices.

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