



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS®  
OF OREGON**

March 19, 2015

To: Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
Subcommittee on Transportation and Economic Development  
Senator Betsy Johnson and Representative David Gomberg, Co-Chairs  
[WaysandMeans.TransportationEcDevSub@state.or.us](mailto:WaysandMeans.TransportationEcDevSub@state.or.us)

Re: SB 5525, Oregon Business Development Department, Regional Infrastructure Fund - CONCERNS

The League of Women Voters is a nonpartisan, grassroots political organization that encourages informed and active participation in government. The League has supported Community Solutions and the structures that followed. We support agencies working together on issues of mutual concern to provide better answers and create government efficiencies so long as they administer each agency's laws and rules.

Our concern with this latest version, Regional Solutions (RS), began as we saw staff at natural resource agencies being asked to participate in yet another set of meetings with more responsibilities, while the agencies suffered budget cuts related to their original missions. So we raised these concerns and supported additional agency staff to assure that both missions could be addressed.

With the advent of Regional Solutions Advisory Committees (RACs), we raised concerns about the public's opportunity to participate in decisions that affect state dollars and state staffing. We had concerns that there are 11 regions, yet 36 counties and 242 cities. Each region officially has ONE county representative and ONE city representative. Yes, many of these RACs have included additional members, but, as usual, it's those who sit at the table who are most often heard.

Some region meetings are difficult for other city and county government officials to attend, let alone members of the public. There is ONE business representative, yet a wide variety of businesses with a wide variety of needs as evidenced by the multitude of programs Business Oregon provides. We know that, at one RAC meeting, the local recreational business sector was dismissed while others were considered, yet that sector is a substantial portion of that region's economy. And the projects under the RS program often have environmental impacts, yet there is no representative addressing those concerns on the RACs. Agency staff who are charged with processing the permits for these projects are influenced by the economic values that can affect their fair processing of these permits, particularly if there is not a counter balanced voice in the room.

We have worked with the Governor's Regional Solutions staff to improve meeting notices, web presence and have had League members attend meetings and monitor activities. We've advertised the program, the RAC priority setting process and meetings. Yet we still have concerns about the state financing of programs, or projects, is not widely known. And our efforts (and the state's) to increase public awareness are still less than adequate.

As we fight for every dollar received for operating natural resource agency programs, we see the possibility of \$22 million being allocated to these RACs to spend at their discretion. At least in 2014 there was a specific list of projects viewable to legislators during the state budget process. One of those projects, the workforce housing loan program in North Central RS, we see as a pilot that might be replicated in other parts of the state where

workforce housing is needed. But each project should have wide public consideration. It is also now a requirement that other grants and funding opportunities of the natural resource agencies take into consideration “regional priorities”. This makes the RAC decisions even more important when it comes to spending state resources.

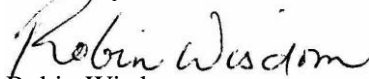
Senator Johnson has asked Business Oregon to provide job descriptions related to other programs within the department. We suggest that a similar ask be considered for Regional Solutions (RS). There is staff from the Governor’s office for each region, including 2 staff directly funded by Business Oregon. Then there are Business Oregon staffers doing Business Development work outside of the RS program (9 Business Development Officers, for instance). And staff from the other core agencies: Dept. of Environmental Quality, Land Conservation and Development, Transportation and Housing, as well as other agency staff “as needed”. Additionally, the Governor’s 2015 budget includes an “Alignment Coordinator” housed directly in the Governor’s office, as well as one in the Dept. of Agriculture budget, two in Land Conservation and Development and a fourth in Environmental Quality—all to be housed in the Governor’s office. These positions are new; there are also some additional natural resource agency staff proposed to support RS. A program meant to increase efficiency is growing into a bureaucratic elephant with staffing that might better be allocated to these agencies to actually process permits.

The RACs also seem to be yet another layer of government that need to be managed, coordinated and require staffing in order to assure they are run in an open, fair and public manner. There is work being done to try to standardize the process, but each RAC is run independently without legislative oversight, yet they have the power to spend state dollars and direct state staff.

The League simply asks that this Subcommittee review this program, and consider the consequences of the growing staffing requirements and the monies being allocated, to see if there might be better use of some of the FTEs and current programs, where the monies could fit so as not to create yet another bucket of money where expenditures are hard to follow and might not be the best use of state dollars. This request does not ask for the dissolution of the RS program. We just believe that, albeit with good intentions, the legislature has abrogated its fiduciary responsibilities. Staffing might be reduced while still accomplishing the goals of the program. The existence of the RACs might be reconsidered or membership expanded to assure broader representation of governments, businesses and others in each region.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,



Robin Wisdom  
President



Peggy Lynch  
Natural Resources Coordinator

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