

Submitter: Jim Brown
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SB1051

Chair Jama, Vice Chair Bonham, and members of the committee. My name is Jim Brown and I am testifying in opposition to Senate Bill 1051.

I spent 36 years of my forestry career with the Department of Forestry – 17 of those as State Forester, the second longest tenure of any state forester in Oregon history. From 1986-2003, I served as State Forester under 4 different governors and many Board of Forestry members until I left to become the natural resources adviser to Gov. Ted Kulongoski. Each of those Governors had input in the direction of the agency and the decisions I had to make as its leader, without having the direct ability to hire or fire me.

The job of being the State Forester isn't just about running an agency. It is about earning the trust and respect of the legislature, governor, county commissioners, stakeholders like the timber industry and conservation groups, ODF employees, and the public. To build the relationships needed to earn that trust, it takes time – and it takes a lot longer than a 4-year term.

Turning this position into a political appointee wouldn't solve the problems facing the agency today – it would exacerbate them. I served as president of the National Association of State Foresters and interacted with leaders of forestry departments in all 50 states and U.S. territories. What I can tell you is the agencies whose leaders were political appointees were constantly challenged by changes in direction and organization.

The Department of Forestry is multifaceted, with each division running like its own business. It wasn't until I was about 7 years into the job that I really understood what it meant and how I could lead the agency to success. You don't step into this position, you grow into it.

To be successful as the State Forester, you have to understand the larger picture and the entire gamut of responsibilities while understanding the details of each division. State Forests, Forest Resources, Fire Protection, and other programs all have their own work plans and operate differently. For those programs and staff to be successful, the agency must have a leader who deeply understands those details and can guide them through challenging times. That cannot be achieved by a short-term political appointee or by those without forestry experience.

Forestry is "the scientific management of forests for the continuous and sustainable

production of goods and services." The scientific basis of forestry has evolved over time as research and experience have grown. Forest policy has also evolved dramatically over time as the values and needs of our society have changed. A thorough understanding of both forest science and policy is essential to lead the agency and help the Board of Forestry make sound decisions to assist the state sustainably manage its private and public forests over time. Without a sound understanding of forestry, the State Forester cannot provide effective leadership of the agency.

This bill is a solution in search of a problem. The Board of Forestry provides a diverse set of voices who understand the agency and the role of the state forester and are capable of selecting the best person for the job.

Turning this position into a political appointee with no forestry experience would be a disservice to the State of Oregon. I urge you to oppose this bill.