



OREGON HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 10, 2026

Chairs Jama and Gomberg and members of the committee:

SB 1599 seeks to move the referendum on Governor Tina Kotek's multi-billion-dollar gas tax and fee hikes—enacted through Chapter 1, Oregon Laws 2025 (special session)—from the promised November 3, 2026, general election ballot to the low-turnout May 19, 2026, primary. Over 250,000 Oregonians signed petitions explicitly stating this vote would occur in November, reflecting their demand for accountability on this unpopular \$4.3 billion tax package, including a 6-cent gas tax increase, doubled payroll tax for transit, and steep DMV fee hikes.

Partisan Election Manipulation

This bill rigs the citizen-driven process in three key ways beyond just shifting the date. First, it replaces the neutral citizen committee for the 500-word explanatory statement with a legislative panel dominated by politicians who voted for the tax. Second, it eliminates the standard financial estimate committee—comprising the Secretary of State, Treasurer, DAS, and a local expert—and assigns control to pro-tax legislators, skewing cost disclosures to voters. Third, it scraps the 120-day deadline for voters' pamphlet arguments, allows the Secretary of State to impose a last-minute cutoff, and permits hiding arguments from public view post-filing, stifling debate.

Undermining Voter Trust

Senate President Rob Wagner admitted the political motive: "Is it political? For sure. I don't think people want to see this on a November ballot." Yet the "people" he references exclude the 250,000+ petitioners. Low May turnout favors entrenched interests, dodging accountability amid Kotek's reelection and Democrats defending seats. Oregonians rallied against this tax-and-spend agenda last year; changing rules post-petition erodes faith in direct democracy.

99% of the testimony submitted into the record was opposed. I urge the committee to listen and oppose SB 1599. Honor the petitions and keep this gas tax referendum on the November 2026 ballot as promised. Oregon's tradition of citizen-led elections demands transparency, not manipulation.

Respectfully submitted into the record,

Shelly Boshart Davis
Oregon State Representative, District 15