

BEN WESTLUND



FOR OREGON STATE TREASURER

Meet Ben

BEN WESTLUND has been an entrepreneur and business owner, an Oregon legislator and an advocate for responsible budgeting, improving healthcare, investing in education and cultural funding.

Born September 3, 1949, Ben moved to Oregon as a teenager. He graduated from Whitman College with a BA in education and history and continued his graduate studies at the University of Oregon.

In 1974, he moved to Central Oregon and founded an innovative company that made non-toxic, safe substances from the crushed fossils of marine life, known as "diamataceous earth" that was commonly used in livestock operations. The best-known product was "Kitty Diggins" cat litter. After selling that successful business, Ben brought his marketing skills to bear in cattle-breeding. Centered on a prize-winning bull, Reggie, Ben built an international animal husbandry business, selling genetics.

After two decades of running successful businesses, Ben was considering a career change to nursing when a friend suggested he run for the Legislature. A tireless campaigner who connects with people regardless of political party, Ben was elected to the Oregon House of Representatives in 1997 as a moderate Republican. He quickly earned respect for his grasp of issues and for his ability to work across the political spectrum. In his first session, he crossed party lines to support the Employment Non-discrimination Act and to uphold Oregon's voter-approved Death with Dignity Act.

In 1999, Westlund proposed and passed legislation to create "The Fallen Officers" fund, from assessments on convicted criminals who put officers at risk to provide much-needed financial assistance to families of public safety officers killed and critically injured in the line of duty. He also supported the creation of the Oregon College Savings Network.

In 2001, Westlund was the architect, and now serves on the board, of the Oregon Cultural Trust, an innovative public private partnership designed to expand Oregon's economy through investment in the Arts.

That session, he also was named co-chair of the budget-writing Joint Ways and Means Committee. When Oregon's economy spiraled downward during the recession and armed with his knowledge of the state budget, Westlund helped lead a bipartisan coalition that cut \$1.3 billion during five special sessions, yet spared most essential core services.

Because of his leadership in advocating for more revenue to soften the cuts to Oregon's education, public safety and human services needs, the Republican leadership removed Westlund from his post as co-chair of the budget committee in 2002.

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Believing that Oregon's tax structure created the financial instability, Westlund served as vice-chair on a 2003 interim joint committee to examine Oregon's over-reliance on the income tax paid by hard-working Oregonians that fluctuates with economic ups and downs.

Westlund also chaired a committee that year charged with making the Oregon Health Plan more economically sustainable. That concern for healthcare turned personal when Ben was diagnosed with lung cancer. Two weeks later, he received statewide attention when he returned to the floor of the Legislature and called for reform of Oregon's antiquated tax structure. In that speech, he called for legislators to "stop being mere politicians who think only of the next election, and start being statesmen who think only of the next generation."

In the final days of the 2003 session, Ben was appointed to the Senate. In 2004, he was nominated for his Senate seat by both Republicans and Democrats in separate primary ballots, received over 80% of the final votes cast in the general election.

During the 2005 legislative session, Ben championed efforts to decrease healthcare costs and to increase access. A proponent of alternative energy, he led efforts to expand the solar energy tax credit. He became a target of radicals in the Republican party for being a chief sponsor of a bill to create civil unions and extend non-discrimination laws to all Oregonians.

In February 2006, Westlund declared his independence from the Republican Party and launched a statewide campaign for Governor that gathered 50,000 signatures and raised over half a million dollars in six months from people hoping for a better Oregon. In August, after determining he would not win and would only act as a spoiler, Westlund withdrew. That fall he campaigned to defeat a pair of initiatives that would have enacted deep and irresponsible tax cuts that would have devastated Oregon schools, health programs and the state's quality of life.

He later endorsed the Democratic incumbent Ted Kulongoski and, after the election, became a Democrat himself.

In the 2007 session, Westlund co-chaired the committee that produced the Healthy Oregon Act to reform Oregon's health system to lower costs, improve quality and cover every Oregonian. He supported efforts to protect Oregonians from predatory lending and identity theft and to prevent expiration dates on gift cards. He also worked to expand Oregon's use of renewable energy and passed legislation to expand opportunities for craft distillers.

Professionally, Ben is a consultant who advises healthcare providers about increasing efficiencies. He and his wife Libby, who serves on the Mount Bachelor National Ski Patrol, recently celebrated their 20th anniversary. They have two children: a son B.J. (18) and a daughter Taylor (14). They live in Tumalo, just outside Bend.