



Drive to finish in Salem continues;

wrap-up could come Thursday

02:00 PM PDT on Wednesday, June 27, 2007

JULIA SILVERMAN, Associated Press writer

SALEM, Ore. (AP) -- The push to close down the 2007 legislative session by the end of this week continued Wednesday, with lawmakers taking up a potpourri of bills, from spending for construction on university campuses to a proposed NASCAR-style speedway in Eastern Oregon.

Only a few contentious issues remained on the calendar, including an overhaul of government ethics regulations that would ban former lawmakers from immediately working as lobbyists and set a \$50 limit on gifts and meals lawmakers can accept from lobbyists.



kgw.com Graphic

Vigorous debate was also expected over a measure to require each of Oregon's 36 counties to prepare a plan outlining when it's OK for police to use deadly force. And disagreements brewed over a bill to give adult foster care home providers the right to bargain collectively with the state.

On Wednesday morning, House members were nearly unanimous in their support for a bill to put \$275 million of taxpayer and lottery-backed bonds into construction and maintenance on university and community college campuses.

"The needs for capital construction are enormous," said Rep. Larry Galizio, D-Clackamas. "This goes a long way toward addressing deferred maintenance and new construction, while keeping our debt service level sustainable."

But Rep. Bob Jenson, R-Pendleton, said he was disappointed not to see more for universities in the rural parts of the state.

"I find it a little distressing that apparently, if you are not on the I-5 corridor someplace, you don't have

universities, or

students who want to go to these universities," he said.

Republican lawmakers also criticized the so-called "Christmas tree bill," the catchall spending bill issued late in the session.

Rep. Kevin Cameron, R-Salem, said he was disappointed that the bill did not include enough to add 40 more Oregon state troopers, on top of the 100 new troopers lawmakers had already approved.

But Rep. Mary Nolan, D-Portland, co-chair of the powerful budget-writing committee, said the money just wasn't there, particularly after efforts to dedicate funding to the state police, from an increase in the beer tax to an auto insurance fee, fell flat.

Both chambers approved a bill to expedite land use review of a destination resort and amenities that would surround a proposed NASCAR-style speedway that developers want to build near the Morrow County town of Boardman.

Two developers have been negotiating with NASCAR in hopes of persuading it to pick Boardman for a Pacific Northwest speedway, which local officials say would be an economic boon to Eastern Oregon.

Rep. Greg Smith, R-Heppner, said the land use bill is aimed at clearing the way for developers to move forward with the speedway project and to show NASCAR that the state supports the \$500 million project.

"We're trying to tell NASCAR, 'We're open for business. Boardman wants you,'" Smith said. The bill now goes to the governor.

There were signs Wednesday of a brief thaw in the tension between the two parties that has defined the closely divided House of Representatives in the final few days of the session.

Speaker Jeff Merkley, the mild-mannered Portland Democrat who presided over the fractious chamber all session, was presented with several gifts from his colleagues, including a new watch to replace one lost in the first week of the session, and a new bicycle, complete with helmet.

His current bicycle, Merkley said, is 20 years old and weighs in at around 35 pounds.

"Should I ever make it out to exercise again, now I can at least look the part, even if I'm not in shape," he joked.