

On December 3 City Club hosted three local legislators – Senator Lee Beyer (D-Springfield), Representative Cedric Hayden (R- Cottage Grove) and Representative John Lively (D-Springfield) for a preview of the upcoming legislative session. Several significant issues appear to be crowding the agenda (for which over 4,000 bills have already been filed). What emerged as major issues in the discussion were the budget (which Sen. Beyer looks a little worse); dealing with major concerns about housing and healthcare (particularly mental health); wildfire and forest management; implementing Measure 110(which decriminalizes many actives that would have been drug offense); small business relief; and redistricting.



**Sen. Lee Beyer**

As crowded as that agenda is, there remains uncertainty about how the Legislature will meet during the pandemic. At this point the legislators seem to think that from when the session opens in late January through March the Legislature will try to avoid meeting in person but handle committee and work session work remotely, going into Salem maybe once a week to cast votes. The legislators hope to be back in Salem by April, but that remains uncertain.



**Rep. Cedric Hayden**

In response to a question from the audience Sen. Beyer noted that the Governor’s budget proposes to close three prisons during the current biennium. He assured the audience that the closures were, in large part, because the need for inmate space has declined. He said that if the proposal goes through, which he said is far from certain at this time, violent offenders would not be released and that, in most cases, those released would have been convicted of crimes that would no longer be jailable offenses under Measure 110.

Representative Hayden observed that releases could compound the problems of homelessness and housing if these individuals have no place to return to in the outside world. there could be some value in closing those facilities, particularly If the savings could be used to improve mental health programs and support for small businesses, particularly in rural counties. He said that some money could be diverted into supporting fire prevention jobs in rural areas, to help alleviate the concern about wildfires in the coming months.



Rep. John Lively

The intertwined issues of housing supply and homelessness were clearly a major concern, but no clear solutions were offered.

The uncertainty of continued federal assistance was an issue noted by Representative Lively. It is essential to continue many of the programs founded by the federal CARES Act, he said, particularly those that support small businesses, which are not presently funded in the Governor's budget according to Rep. Lively. If federal relief is not forthcoming (and he and

Sen. Beyer noted the Governor's budget is heavily reliant on continued federal aid) a challenging budget situation could become much worse. Rep. Lively said there may be a need to target an y future round of Payroll Protection Plan funding at services industries – restaurants and bars, barbershops, and other personal service businesses. Rep. Lively said that the Emergency Board recently created a simplified process to distribute the last \$20 million in funding, but that the system was overwhelmed only 20 minutes after it opened with h \$95 million in applications.

All three legislators seemed confident that the Legislature could successfully craft a redistricting plan without letting the issue default to the Secretary of State, although Sen, Beyer noted that there may be some difficulty getting the necessary data in a timely fashion, given the issues that have arisen in completing the 2020 census. Each legislator expressed some level of support for an independent redistricting commission, although they noted that issue had fail to b=make the ballot in 2020 and is not likely to have great support in the legislature.