

In 2002, I became the head of what they called External and Legislative Affairs of the Oregon Academy of Family Physicians, and that also put me in the legislative committee for the Oregon Medical Association. I started spending a lot of time in Salem at the legislature working on advocating to help every Oregonian have access to high-quality, affordable care, because I knew how important that was, and I knew how important Primary Care was in doing it. I was really talking about patients, and not doctors. I got more and more involved, and people would say to me, “Oh, you’d be a great legislator” and I’d say “too much, I just want to focus on healthcare.” And a couple of things happened simultaneously in 2011. The first was I’d become more and more aware of the research on social determinants of health, and I realized that if what I really want is for Oregon to be the healthiest state in the nation, I have to have Oregon have the best education system in the nation, and a sustainable economy, and a good environment, and great transportation, and transit infrastructure, and all the things that we know how people thrive as whole people. Cause really health is only a tiny percent determined by what happens in the doctor's office. So I got more and more interested in that, and I also became aware that many legislators are like physicians: they tend to specialize in one area. They’re an education person, or a health care person, or a business and transportation person, but I’m a family doctor. I see things in this very matrixed, interconnected way, and I thought that having a generalist in the legislature might not be such a bad idea. My kids were a little older by then, and I thought that it would give me an opportunity to do something a little different. And I started to get encouragement again from friends of mine, and then my Congressman decided to resign, which was a good choice. And a good friend of mine Suzanne Bonamici, who at that point was my state senator. We were talking about whether she was going to run for the congressional seat, and she said you know if I run and I win I think you should go for my seat.