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Dear Friends and Neighbors:

First of all, I want to extend to you all my best wishes for a very happy new year. I'm sorry that I haven't been able to get this newsletter out sooner. As many of you know, I've been dealing with a very serious health problem in my family: my wife, Kiki, developed a sudden and devastating Strep-A blood infection at the end of December, which landed her in the intensive-care unit for two weeks, with her life at risk and in question. Fortunately, the excellent medical professionals at Kaiser were able to get her back from the brink and onto the long road to recovery and rehabilitation. I can't say enough about the quality of care (and caring) that we received, along with the many expressions of concern, kindness, and support from so many people. Thank you, everyone.

Obviously, this experience has been a huge distraction from my legislative duties. Fortunately, I've been able to rely on my two wonderful assistants, Logan and Michelle, to pick up a lot of the slack with correspondence and participation at meetings, so we've been able to stay on track with our legislative priorities. Now that Kiki is safely in rehab, I can devote more of my attention to the Legislature. In this newsletter, I'll give you a preview of some of what's in store in the upcoming session.

Don't forget two upcoming opportunities to share your thoughts with me—more information below.

### **The New Legislative Session—Co-Speakers, Co-Chairs, and Shared Responsibility**

Oregon's 76th Legislative Assembly kicks into full gear tomorrow, with regular floor sessions and committee hearings. Tomorrow is also the day that Governor Kitzhaber releases his proposed budget. While the Legislature will certainly make many changes to the proposed budget, the Governor's budget is very influential in setting the framework for what will eventually be adopted. We'll have highlights and analysis in the next newsletter.

With a \$3.5 billion budget deficit, a new Governor, and a tied House of Representatives, this legislative session will be a real test for all of us. It should also be a great learning experience, as both parties are forced to work together to balance the budget and pass good public policy. I'm cautiously optimistic about the weeks ahead. I appreciate the

spirit of inclusiveness that exists—from what I've seen so far, more bills have sponsors from both parties, which augurs well for their eventual success.

On the other hand, there are potentially more opportunities for gridlock, since the co-Speakers will have to agree on all appointments and bill referrals, and the committee co-chairs will have to agree on how the bills referred to their committees will be handled (though we have built in some safeguards to prevent gridlock). Each committee (mirroring the House) has equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans, so a bill will need to have at least some bipartisan support to make its way to the floor or even to be amended. Should be interesting. I'll let you know how it's going.

This session, I'll be serving as one of the two Co-Chairs of the Higher Education Subcommittee in the House, along with my Republican colleague from Hood River, Rep. Mark Johnson. I am also on the Education Committee and the Ways & Means Subcommittee on Education (the budget committee). I'm very much looking forward to focusing on education issues this session, though I'm not looking forward to 8:30 AM meetings in Salem every day!

Regarding higher education, we're going to be faced with some interesting challenges this session, not counting the enormous budgetary challenges that we face. We'll be asked to make some far-reaching and difficult decisions related to the organization and governance of post-secondary education in this state. Obviously, there are a number of competing interests (and lobbyists) at work here. My own goal is to help us find that "sweet spot" where the universities and colleges are free from unnecessary bureaucratic requirements (which help drive up the cost of education), but at the same time are working together as a system to coordinate their efforts and their resources. In addition to governance decisions, our subcommittee will be dealing with a wide variety of bills related to post-secondary education and workforce development. Since our committee and the Senate Education Committee meet at the same time (TTh, 1-3 pm), we'll be holding a number of joint hearings—starting with the very first week of the session.

Our HD45 team this session includes some familiar faces and some new ones. Michelle Rogelstad, who many of you have met since she came to work for me last July, will stay on as my aide during the session, focusing on constituent outreach and health care policy. Logan Gilles, who was one of my aides during the 2009 session, has returned from a journey to Ohio and will again be in my office helping with education and other policy areas. We also have two interns from Portland State who will be joining us for the session, Donilee McGinnis and Dane Gatewood (who happens also to be an HD45 constituent).

As always, my staff is here as your resource. If you're having issues with a state agency, need information about government services, or want to know more about what's going on in Salem, give my office a call or send an email. During the session, you can reach us in the Capitol at 503-986-1445.

### **Senior Town Hall attracts a crowd**

Last Monday afternoon, Sen. Jackie Dingfelder and I held a town hall at the Hollywood

Senior Center focused on seniors' issues. About 100 people attended. (Thanks to those of you who helped make the event a success!) We heard from Sen. Ginny Burdick about some of the revenue issues facing senior programs in Oregon and the need to find a stable revenue source for programs like Oregon Project Independence that allow seniors to stay in their homes and avoid more costly institutional care. We were joined by representatives from Congressman Bluemauer, Senator Wyden, Commissioner Fish, SEIU, and County Chair Jeff Cogen, and a variety of seniors' organizations. I want to thank Amber and the Hollywood Senior Center again for hosting, and a special thanks to Michelle from my office and Jill from Senator Dingfelder's office for helping to put the event together.

### **Single Payer Conference a Huge Success**

As I've mentioned before, I strongly believe that a patchwork of health insurance reforms is not going to get us universal access to quality care, nor will it put the brakes on the soaring cost of health care that is putting such a strain on our state and federal budgets, not to mention small and large businesses alike. We need a comprehensive system, as most other industrialized countries have, one that would effectively extend an improved Medicare system to everyone. We need single payer.

I'm in the final stages of working with Legislative Counsel on the final draft of the Affordable Health Care for All Oregon Act. I'll be submitting it in the House this week or early next week, and Senator Shields will be doing the same in the Senate. I'll let you know more about that and give you the link to the bill as soon as it is submitted.

Moving this country, or even this state, to a single-payer system is a huge, arduous, ambitious undertaking, and getting there will take enormous effort, enormous dedication, and enormous patience. It will require a serious informational and organizing campaign throughout the state. It will take a movement. Fortunately, there are many, many people out there who are committed to making this happen.

I was reminded of that fact this past Saturday, when nearly 400 people from around the state converged on Portland to learn more about state and national efforts to create this change, and to be part of the change. (The organizers of the conference were expecting two hundred at most.) The keynote speaker for the event was Rep. John Conyers, now in his 23rd term representing Michigan in the U.S. House of Representatives. A long-time fighter for social justice, Conyers has long been working to pass legislation to create a national plan. Conyers brought a great deal of perspective to the issue (his tenure in Congress goes back to the Sixties, when Medicare and Medicaid were first voted in), and a lot of good humor—which has obviously served him well in his years of dedicated commitment to this issue. Conyers was joined by Dr. Margaret Flowers from Physicians for a National Health Plan, one of the movement's most articulate spokespersons.

I led a break-out session on the state legislation, which attracted around 70 participants and many, many questions and comments. I let them know that we're looking at hearings on the bill in early March and expect a large turnout at the Capitol. Many of those 400 attendees have pledged to be there and to bring their friends and family.

We'll have lots of information about the bill and the topic of single payer on our website, including a video of Dr. Flowers' informative and inspiring speech.

### **Constituent Coffee and Budget Town Hall**

This coming Saturday, February 5th, is my next regular constituent coffee. Join me from 9:30 AM to 11 at Case Study Coffee (5347 NE Sandy, just east of the Bike Gallery). I'll have the first week of session to report on, and hopefully some updated information about the Governor's proposed budget to share with you.

Thursday, February 10th, from 7-8:30 PM, I will be hosting a joint town hall focused on the state budget at PCC Southeast Center (SE 82nd and Division). Join me, Rep. Ben Cannon, Sen. Jackie Dingfelder, and other state legislators to discuss our upcoming efforts to balance the budget and protect crucial services.

As always, thanks for your support and your interest.

*Michael*

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