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E-Newsletter

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Dear Friends and Neighbors:

Today, we start the fourth week of this 2011 Legislative Session.

These last few weeks have been very intense (many Capitol veterans have characterized it as the quickest-paced beginning to a session that they have ever experienced). This is partly due to the pressures of the budget, partly due to having a new governor, and partly due to the fact that a lot of preparatory work was done during the interim, so that “big” bills are ready to be heard much more quickly.

In addition, for us in the House, everyone is still getting used to our new shared governance model. I’m happy to report that at least from my perspective, things seem to be working out pretty well. I have a good, productive relationship with Mark Johnson (R-Hood River), my fellow Co-Chair of the House Higher Education Subcommittee. We share a common desire to make real improvements in student access to high-quality, affordable higher education—and not just rearranging the deck chairs in our governance system.

If my committee is any indication, we’re on a good path. In particular, I’ve been impressed by the number of bills being submitted that have co-sponsors from both parties. That’s not surprising when you consider that in order to pass out of committee and go to the House floor for a vote, every bill will have to have at least some bipartisan support. (Committees have equal numbers of Democrats and Republicans, and a bill, with all its amendments, must receive a majority vote from the committee in order to move on.)

In this newsletter, I’ll be talking about some of my own bills that have been “dropped” in the last week or so (“dropped” is a good thing, as I’ll explain below), along with a report on the new revenue forecast and our recent town hall.

Finally, I’m happy to report that my wife, Kiki, is continuing to make slow but steady progress in her rehabilitation and recovery from the bloodstream infection. In just the last couple of days, she has at last begun to walk again. True, with assistance and so far not many steps at a time, but I can’t tell you just how wonderful it feels!

Dropping Bills

You might think “dropping a bill” is similar to “dropping the ball”—i.e., a bad thing. But

in fact it's an important step in the legislative process. After a bill has been drafted by Legislative Counsel, i.e., transformed from concept to legal document, it's up to the chief sponsor(s) to round up an initial group of co-sponsors (ideally including some from the other party and from the other chamber). Then, it's time to submit the bill—to “drop” it at the desk of the Chief Clerk of the House or Secretary of the Senate.

Last Thursday, February 17, was the deadline for most bills to be submitted (individual members are able to submit a few “priority” bills later in the session, but these are exceptional). So, as you can imagine, legislators and their staffers were scrambling to get co-sponsors and beat the deadline during much of last week. The next step is for these bills to be introduced (“first read”) in the House and Senate this week, and then referred by the Speakers and the Senate President to committees.

Over the last couple of weeks, the following bills, which I chief-sponsored alone or with one or more other representatives or senators, were dropped:

HB 2963, The Affordable Textbook Act
HB 3118, Use of Part-Time Faculty in Higher Education
HB 3362, Career & Technical Education (more on this below)
HB 3401, Work and Family Life Task Force
HB 3521, Transfer Student Bill of Rights
HB 3320, Unemployment Benefits for Part-Time Faculty
HB 3522, Physician Self-Referral
HB 3510, The Affordable Health Care for All Oregon Act (Single Payer)
SB 742, Tuition Equity (more on this below)

SB 742—Extending Opportunity through Tuition Equity

I've been working on a number of bills designed to make college more accessible and affordable to young Oregonians. One of the most important and most promising of these is the Tuition Equity bill, which focuses on those young Oregonians who were brought to this country at a young age by parents who never established legal residence. I've gotten to know many of these young people over the years through my work at the college, and theirs are stories of heartbreak and missed opportunity. Through no fault of their own, they find themselves in limbo. They have no home to go to other than Oregon. They have attended school in Oregon, graduated from an Oregon high school, worked hard enough to be accepted at an Oregon university, but unlike their classmates, they must pay out-of-state tuition, which is unaffordable. Their talent, and the investment that we made in them to put them through high school, is wasted.

SB 742 would fix this problem and allow Oregon to profit from their talent and their determination. Students who meet a strict set of qualifications would be treated the same as other Oregon high school graduates.

Eleven other states have chosen to enact tuition equity over the last ten years: Texas, New Mexico, California, Washington, Illinois, New York, Nebraska, Utah, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, and Kansas. As you can see, most of these states are on the conservative side of the political spectrum, yet they have chosen to open the doors of opportunity to these young people. Here in Oregon, my three fellow Chief-Sponsors on this effort are all Republican: Sen. Frank Morse from Corvallis/Albany, Sen. Dave Nelson from Pendleton, and Rep. Bob Jenson from Pendleton. The list of co-sponsors includes additional Republicans as well. Given all the rhetoric around immigration (my email box already is full of extremely inflammatory, distasteful messages), their courageous willingness to sign onto this effort is inspiring.

We had a great press conference last Monday, the same time we dropped the bill in the Senate. Along with the chief sponsors, we had stirring testimony from Jessica, a high school student from South Eugene, a member of this “lost generation” in need of tuition equity. Nearly 100 students were on hand to celebrate that historic moment. To see footage of the news conference, [check out KATU’s coverage of the press conference here](#). You can [read my speech from the conference here](#).

This weekend [the Oregonian came out in strong support of SB 742](#). To read the bill itself, [go here](#).

Stay tuned. You’ll be hearing much more about this effort.

Career/Technical Education Bill Attracts Huge Support

In past newsletters I’ve reported on last year’s Task Force on Career/Technical Education Collaborations, created to analyze the value of reinvesting in CTE in our schools. Most districts have cut back dramatically on their course offerings in CTE in the wake of budget cuts. Based on my own experience door-knocking when running for office, many voters are unhappy with this state of affairs.

The task force discovered that the few remaining programs are extremely successful, despite their funding constraints: students who are fully enrolled in CTE Programs of Study (for example, Engineering, Construction Trades, Pre-Nursing, Broadcast Journalism, Agriculture, and many others) graduate at much higher rates (95%+) than the average student population. Many of the surviving programs have found creative ways to partner with local colleges, labor unions, industry, non-profits, and even other districts. We decided that the state needs more partnerships like these in order to stretch education funding further. As a result, the [task force produced a set of recommendations](#) that have become the basis of HB 3362.

In crafting the bill, I’ve been working with Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian, who has for many years been passionately arguing that CTE needs to come back to our high schools, and even our middle schools. We took his plan for a number of CTE-reinvestment pilot projects around the state and put it together with the task force

recommendations for enhanced partnerships. The district proposals that include the kinds of concrete partnerships recommended by the task force will have the best chance of being funded.

The goal of restoring CTE to our schools is clearly resonating with legislators. (Commissioner Avakian's determined advocacy has certainly not hurt!) Support is bipartisan and broad: 8 Chief Sponsors (2 from each party in each chamber), 20 of 30 senators, and 35 of 60 representatives. I'm expecting great things from this effort.

Revenue Forecast Projects Improvement in the Economy

This past Tuesday, the state economist released the latest revenue forecast for the current biennium, and it tells us that we will be able to get through the remainder of the fiscal year (i.e., through June 30) without further cuts to the budget. After so many negative forecasts, leading to many budget cuts, this one comes as a real relief. We will have to go further into our remaining reserves, though, because of projected income tax reductions due to changes in the federal tax code.

Revenue from corporate taxes, which had been higher than anticipated in the past two forecasts, has dropped somewhat. As a result, the corporate kicker—which had been projected to kick next year to the tune of around \$25 million—will not kick this year, so that sum won't be returned to corporations next year.

The economist is projecting a gradual, steady improvement in the economy over the next couple of years. Earlier fears of a "double-dip recession" now seem unlikely both nationally and in Oregon. However, despite an improving climate for business, unemployment will continue to be a problem, especially in the construction trades.

[You can read the forecast here.](#)

Town Hall Recap

Two weeks ago, 70 constituents joined me, Senator Jackie Dingfelder, Representative Ben Cannon, and our special guest Representative Peter Buckley, at PCC Southeast for a Town Hall focused on the budget. Rep. Buckley, a veteran of the budget wars and one of the Co-Chairs of the Ways and Means Committee, gave a great presentation outlining the Governor's proposed budget, the legislative process and the challenges that lay ahead. The basic take-away from the presentation was the need to look for long-term solutions, rather than focus on short-term cuts.

We then took questions from the audience, and had a discussion that included the importance of preserving jobs training programs; the budget costs related to mandatory minimum sentencing laws; diverting our "kicker" into a Rainy Day Fund; and the possibility of more comprehensive revenue reform down the line. It was great to see so many folks from the neighborhood, familiar faces and some new ones. Thanks to those of you who came out, and I especially want to thank Peter Buckley for making the trip up from his district in Ashland to spend the evening with us.

New Newsletter Format

You may notice that the newsletter looks a little different this week. I've changed from a private email service to the state's GovDelivery service. The switch represents a significant cost savings, allowing me to better direct my office resources toward serving you. I hope this is a seamless transition, but please let me know if you have any issues viewing or reading the newsletter.

Best,

Michael

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