



## Rep. Michael Dembrow

Oregon House District 45  
NE Portland, Maywood Park & Parkrose

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### E-Newsletter

Today's Date

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

Last week at the Capitol felt a lot like being in school. The week started with kids, parents, teachers, and other education advocates assembling en masse on Presidents Day to push legislators to find ways to increase and stabilize funding for our schools. By the end of the week, we were experiencing the excitement of a potential snow day. I have to confess that the thought of being able to stay home in Portland for a day was very, very appealing. It didn't work out that way, but for a little while it felt good to feel like a kid again.

In this newsletter, I'll go over some of the work done on my committees last week, say something about the "rebalance" bills that were passed yesterday, and look forward to the challenges and excitement of the week to come.

### Constituent Coffee This Saturday

I hope you'll take some time out of your Saturday morning to join me for my monthly constituent coffee. This month, we'll be hosted by the Maywood Park campus of Mount Hood Community College. We'll be in room 223 on the second floor. There's ample parking available, and a coffee shop right by our meeting room. I've got plenty of updates to share, and I need to hear your thoughts as we move forward with the session. See you Saturday!

What: Constituent Coffee

When: Saturday, March 5<sup>th</sup> from 9:30 AM to 11:00 AM

Where: Maywood Park Campus of MHCC, 102<sup>nd</sup> and NE Prescott

### Lowering Textbook Costs

Last Tuesday, the Higher Education Committee heard testimony on House Bill 2963, a bill I introduced that aims to explore cost-saving measures and propose an implementation plan to make textbooks more affordable for college students. A 2009 OSPIRG study concluded that, on average, U.S. students pay \$700 per year for textbooks and that the price of textbooks has been exponentially rising

over the last decade. [View a Single Pager summary of the bill.](#)

At the hearing, the founder and president of Flat World Knowledge, Eric Frank, testified about how his business utilizes innovation with open source textbooks and how bookstores may partner with instructors and professors to deliver this model at a cheaper price for students. To explore what open source textbooks are, [visit Flat World Knowledge's website.](#)

In addition to having a member of the business community speak to the necessity for lowering textbook prices for students, the committee heard from students who often feel they have to choose between buying textbooks and buying basic necessities. The cost of textbooks even prevents some students from graduating on time. We also heard from non-profit book store owners and college instructors from the university system that have strived to offset costs for students, but are frustrated by the prices set by publishers.

I'm hopeful that this bill will be passed out of the Committee this week and will then go to be voted on by the 60 members of the House on the Floor. Stay tuned to next week's newsletter to follow HB 2963's progress.

### **Tuition Equity Hearing This Thursday**

This Thursday, a public hearing is scheduled for SB 742, [the Tuition Equity bill that I mentioned in last week's newsletter.](#) This is an exciting, bipartisan effort and I'm very much looking forward to the hearing. I'll be testifying alongside my fellow Chief Sponsors—Rep. Bob Jenson (R—Pendleton), Sen. Frank Morse (R—Albany) and Sen. David Nelson (R—Pendleton) in support of the bill. The hearing starts at 1 PM in the Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee, which meets in Hearing Room B in the Capitol. You can [watch the hearing live online by visiting this website](#) on Thursday afternoon and clicking on the video feed for HR B.

### **Rally for Single Payer Healthcare**

After many weeks of organizing, the coalition supporting the Health Care for All Oregon Act (House Bill 3510) will be holding a public rally next Friday, March 11<sup>th</sup>. The rally, which begins at noon on the front steps of the Capitol building, will preclude the public hearing on the bill at 3 PM in the House Health Care Committee in Hearing Room D. If you'd like to join for the rally or the hearing, contact my office for more details. Once again, you can also watch this hearing online by [visiting the legislature's audio/video page](#) and clicking the live feed for HR D.

### **The Education Subcommittee of Ways and Means—Education...and More!**

The Joint (House and Senate) Committee on Ways and Means is charged with taking the Governor's proposed budget, which includes the requests from the various state agencies, and turn it into a final budget that determines the allocation of state resources for the next two years.

That means holding a continual flow of hearings on the various agency budgets, in which legislators probe the agency heads to see how well each agency is meeting its "Key Performance Measures" and what is going on with their budget. This work is done through subcommittees that are responsible for the key areas of the budget: Natural Resources, General Government, Human Services, Transportation and Economic Development, and Education.

As you would expect, the Education Subcommittee is responsible for the big three education sectors—K-12, Community Colleges, and the Oregon University System—which together make up more than half of the state General Fund, funded through our state income taxes (many of the other agencies are funded through user fees).

But for the last couple of weeks, our subcommittee has not listened to a single education-related presentation. Instead, we've heard from a variety of health-related licensing boards, such as the boards that license Dentists, Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Chiropractors, Psychologists, and many others, including tattoo artists, even morticians. Each of these budgets had to be heard somewhere, and for workload reasons, they were given to us. To be honest, it's been pretty interesting to learn about these various occupations and their challenges. (Whether you knew it or not, the mortuary industry is in a real state of flux right now—yes, death is always inevitable and certain, but the way that we address it is not.) For the most part, the role of these boards is to investigate complaints, address wrongdoing, and make sure the professional licensees keep up with their professional development.

These boards are funded entirely through license fees and fines that are collected. There is no General Fund money involved, but the State is responsible for the work that they do. So it's important for us to review their operations and make sure that the fees that they charge are reasonable. So far, they seem to be. I do have some concerns, though, about the very large ending fund balances that some of the boards are maintaining—in some cases they have reserves that are the equivalent of six to eight months of operation, which seems unnecessarily high. I'm exploring some ways for them to bring those down without

jeopardizing their security and stability, which would allow them to pass on some of the savings to their licensees.

This week we at last begin working on The Big Budget--the State School Fund, which of course has been hard hit by the current budget crisis. My own goal is to see it increased as much as possible (in the Governor's budget, it's kept pretty much where it is currently—which is the already the result of deep cuts) and make sure that the money is spent in a way that best supports learning and service to kids. The Governor has some ambitious plans, but his budget makes some assumptions about savings down the road that may or may not pan out as expected. We need to be realistic about that in planning the final budget. Reconciling this budget is going to be one of the key challenges of this session.

As always, if you have any thoughts or questions about topics I've covered this week, send me an email or call my Salem office. Or—better yet—join me this Saturday in Maywood Park!

*Michael*

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