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## State Representative **Michael Dembrow**



Dear Friends and Neighbors:

Needless to say, this is a very busy time. I'm back to teaching, and working on the next Cascade Festival of African Films (we have a very special director coming to town, a director from Chad whose film was the Jury Award winner at the last Cannes Film Festival). I'm continuing to work on my legislation for next session (you'll read about a couple of my bills here), and meeting with allies and constituents to help develop them. But then there are all the other things that legislators are expected to do, which ultimately gives us access to new ideas and new perspectives on important issues. Read about them here!

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### **Better Produce, Better Lunches at Jason Lee**

Last week was National School Lunch Week throughout the country. The Portland Public School District used the occasion to highlight their "Local Lunch/Harvest of the Month" program. This is a Farm to Schools program that introduces Portland kids to the region's great local produce.

I was invited to attend a special celebration on October 13 at [Jason Lee Elementary School](#), a K-8 school located in the southern flanks of Rocky Butte, the high point of our district.

The special feature of the day was the burgers, which all came from grass-fed beef from Wallowa County. The beef was local, sustainably raised, and hormone-free. The program creates a partnership between this urban school district and rural growers and

workers. Also featured were tomatoes from Nature's Fountain Farm in Albany and Apples from Kiyokawa Family Orchards in Parkdale. Both were delicious, and the kids really went after them (they get unlimited amounts of fruits and vegetables).

I got to spend some time with Gitta Grether-Sweeney, director of Nutrition Services for Portland Public Schools (PPS). I learned that nearly a third of all lunch food comes from local growers and companies. Still, since most of the food is paid for by the US Department of Agriculture, and budgets are tight, there are limits on how much can come from local sources. (Oregon is unfortunately one of the few states that does not subsidize local school district lunch programs, so districts are very reliant on federal commodities.) PPS is teaming up with several other large districts across the country to try to pressure the USDA to provide beef that is grass fed and hormone free, as well as chickens that are raised in a more sustainable manner. According to Gitta, it's an uphill battle.

For more information about PPS's efforts to build community around good nutrition, you should check out [eat.think.grow](http://eat.think.grow).

As part of the celebration, I was asked to draw the names of 10 students, who each received a book about how apples first came to Oregon. The kids at this school are great. Jason Lee is extremely diverse in its student population, most of whom come from low-income families, but the kids really seemed solid and together. All the younger students and most of the older ones wear school uniforms, the result of a vote taken by parents and students. They have a first-rate principal, Sascha Perrins, and the overall atmosphere of the school was both serious and supportive. I was impressed.

Being there and being part of this program really put me in a good mood. Better nutrition, better for the environment, better for Oregon business and jobs, better for our communities—I had a grin on my face for hours after that visit.

### **A Bit of the Reality at the Psychiatric State Hospital**

Once a year, Disability Rights Oregon organizes a hearing at the Oregon State Hospital in Salem to hear input from patients regarding their treatment and their care. This year it was held on Monday evening, October 11. I attended, along with Rep. Mitch Greenlick (Chair of the House Health Care Committee), as representatives of the Oregon Legislature. It was also an opportunity for the Hospital's new superintendent, Greg Roberts, to listen and learn.

The program was moderated by a long-term patient at the hospital. There was a mix of positive and negative comments, but not surprisingly, more of the latter. Most of those testifying did have some positive things to say about the new superintendent, the new hires that have happened recently, and the upcoming move to the new hospital. Most of the complaints had to do with a feeling of being trapped in the bureaucracy regarding their release process or unit placement.

My favorite quote was from an older gentleman, who was clearly frustrated with the slowness of the release process: "If they took 'I'm working on it' out of their

vocabulary, they'd have no vocabulary!!!”

Patients at the hospital are a mix of those who have been found not guilty of crimes for reason of insanity, those who have been charged with crimes but have been deemed unable to participate in their own defense, and those who have been civilly committed, determined by the courts to be a danger to themselves or to others.

I've had the opportunity to hear from patients individually or in small groups when they've come to testify to the Human Services Committee. I've also gotten to hear from those who have successfully transitioned to community care and productive lives outside the institution. This was my first time inside, and it was interesting to meet the patients on their own turf, hearing directly from them in their own words. Some were extremely articulate, others somewhat confused, rambling, nervous, or angry. It wasn't the most pleasant experience, but it definitely helped me to have a clearer vision of what life is like in that institution.

### **Higher Education—Comparing Notes with Other States**

Oregon, along with 14 other Western states, belongs to an organization known as WICHE—the Western Interstate Commission on Higher Education. The organization does research, makes policy recommendations, hosts partnerships that allow students to pay in-state tuition in partner states, and creates opportunities for legislators to get together and compare notes on legislation. I'm the Oregon House's representative to WICHE'S Legislative Advisory Committee (Richard Devlin represents the Oregon Senate). We just had our annual meeting last week, and it gave me the opportunity to get to know my counterparts in the other WICHE states: Alaska, Hawaii, Washington, Oregon, California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Colorado, Wyoming, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota.

WICHE is a non-partisan organization, and we were about a 50/50 mix of Democrats and Republican legislators.

Needless to say, we spent a lot of time commiserating about rising tuition, which we're seeing in nearly all states in response to declining state education budgets. Unfortunately, no one had any magic bullets to suggest.

The real focus of the meeting was on strategies for getting more Americans to complete college, despite these cutbacks. The U.S. is slipping in international comparisons of the percentage of their population with post-secondary degrees, despite our relatively large number of colleges and universities. Recent data show that more than 22 percent of the working adult population in the U.S. has attended college but not completed a degree. The “non-traditional student” (older students with family and work responsibilities) are becoming less and less successful. We heard from national experts on some of the reasons for this lack of success: financial pressures due to the ongoing high cost of higher education, the need for extensive remediation in college, college systems that are still not geared to the needs of working adults, poor transfer systems, bureaucratic obstacles, inadequate investment in counseling and customized learning, and higher education/workforce development just not being a priority in many states.

There's a growing national movement to get students to complete their degrees—the lead organization is called Complete College America. We heard from them and from a couple of the students—Ohio and Tennessee—that are at the forefront of engaging with this problem. How do we get our students and faculty the resources that they need? How do we create better transitions from high school to community college to university? How can we create statewide strategies for moving down this road?

### **Granting More Associates Degrees**

Following up on the above item, during the WICHE conference, I was able to share with my legislative colleagues some of my own ideas for legislation around degrees and textbooks. As I know first-hand, community colleges are an effective, low-cost alternative for students seeking higher education. It works. The data consistently show that Oregonians who start at a community college, then transfer to an OUS university do as well or better than those who start at the university, and they save themselves and their families a lot of money.

But life has a way of intervening, and many students find that they are unable to complete their Bachelor's degree quickly or at all. Many students are transferring their credits from community colleges to universities without applying to receive their Associate's degrees because they are focused on that higher degree. These students often wind up finding themselves with no degree at all, even when they have more than enough credits to have earned the Associate's.

This is a problem that should not exist. We have heard from employers that they want potential employees to have degrees. It's in the public interest to have more people with degrees and professional credentials. It's good for the individual's self-esteem and sense of achievement. We should remove any bureaucratic barriers that stand between an individual and the degree.

So, I'm introducing legislation that provides a simple solution to this problem. It says that any student who has earned the necessary credits in the necessary subjects at one or more Oregon community college will automatically be awarded the degree. Also, any eligible credits that they have earned at an OUS university can be wrapped back or "reverse transferred" to qualify them for the AA degree. We now have the computer capability to make this work, and we should. It's another way that the state's universities and community colleges can be working more closely together to save money and increase student success.

I'll let you know how it goes.

### **Standing Up for Textbook Affordability**

If there's one thing that most of us can agree on, it's that college textbooks cost way too much. For many community college students, textbooks may in fact cost more than tuition. I'm convinced that there are ways that we could bring down the cost of textbooks. If we're serious about it, we could slash the cost by half over the next few years. I've got a bill in the works that's intended to do just that.

I recently went down to Eugene to talk about this legislation and to do a joint appearance at the University of Oregon bookstore with OSPiRG, which is working with me on this bill (so are the Oregon Student Association and the American Federation of Teachers-Oregon). The U of O Bookstore manager was also on the program. They too are committed to making textbooks more affordable. To learn more about what the PIRGs are doing with this issue nationally, go to [studentpirgs.org/textbooks](http://studentpirgs.org/textbooks). Stay tuned for more on our legislation.

### **Speaking for Marriage Equality**

On Sunday, September 26, I got to be part of a panel discussion on the many issues surrounding same-sex marriage at Portland's First United Methodist Church. The discussion, part of the church's series of quarterly conversations on difficult topics, was moderated by Emily Harris, host of OPB Radio's *Think Out Loud* show. Same-sex marriage remains unconstitutional in Oregon at present, as a result of Ballot Measure 36, approved by the voters in 2004.

I was joined by Jeana Frazzini, Executive Director of Basic Rights Oregon, in support of marriage equality. The opposing side was represented by Maggie Gallagher, from the National Organization for Marriage, and my Republican colleague in the House, Dennis Richardson from Central Point in Southern Oregon. Bishop Dave Brauer-Rieke of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, was also on the panel.

I found it to be a good, thoughtful discussion overall. I was able to bring in my experience as a member of the House Human Services Committee, which oversees state programs related to children and families. In Oregon we don't discriminate between opposite-sex households and same-sex households when it comes to adoption or foster parenting—the sole criterion is the ability of the parent or parents to give the child a safe, stable, healthy, and loving home environment. This policy has been working out fine, and I agree with it. I was also able to bring in my own experience as someone who has been married for quite a while--37 years! I would like to see this same right extended to my friends and neighbors who are in same-sex relationships.

The discussion was videotaped, and I've been told that the church will be posting it on the internet sometime soon [here](#).

### **Port of Portland Noise Management**

The Citizens Noise Advisory Committee (often referred to as CNAC) met on October 14 to deliver and discuss the most recent six-month study of air traffic and noise. Their study, which includes flight patterns conducted by F-15 jets which are detected by radar and the number of flights and complaints filed, may be found [here](#). The flight patterns you see in this study are a type of approach F-15 jets fly for training purposes called "continuous descent."

The Oregon Air National Guard (ORANG) has pledged to only fly their F-15 jets, often the source of noise complaints, in a continuous descent approach from 9am to 5pm during weekdays only. In 2008, these jets were flying overhead at 2,000 feet and

maintaining that height used thrusters which caused noise over some neighborhoods. Today these jets fly at over 4,000 feet, minimizing the noise impact heard by the surrounding neighborhoods.

If you have any concerns or questions regarding the study by CNAC or aircraft noise, please don't hesitate to contact our district office at 503-281-0608 or email me at [rep.michaeldembrow@state.or.us](mailto:rep.michaeldembrow@state.or.us).

### Schedule of Upcoming Events

- **November 2:** Election Day (ballots due by 8pm!!). For a list of official ballot drop sites, click [here](#).
- **November 6:** Our monthly Constituent Coffee will be held at Case Study Coffee located at 5347 NE Sandy Blvd from 9:30 to 11am.
- **November 19:** The Joint Revenue Committee will meet to announce the December revenue forecast.
- **December 14-16:** December Legislative Committee Days

*Michael*

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