



State Representative **Michael Dembrow**



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Dear Friends and Constituents,

Bringing my First Bill to the Floor

I had the honor of carrying my first bill to the floor today, HB 2135. Each time a bill comes to the floor, one representative introduces the bill and answers any questions that other representatives have. HB 2135 establishes a policy requiring that housing rental agreements include a section disclosing the smoking policy for the rental unit or units and their premises. HB 2135 passed 58-1. Once this bill passes the Senate, rental agreements will clearly tell tenants if smoking is allowed on the entire premises, if it is prohibited entirely from the premises, or if it is allowed only in limited areas.

Individuals need to be given the information that they need to make intelligent decisions for themselves and their families with respect to their exposure to second-hand smoke. In committee we heard and received testimony from a number of individuals who had moved into apartment buildings, only to find themselves in units located next to or above those of smokers, and they were then essentially trapped there for the duration of the lease. I am excited to have brought this important bill to the floor.

Legislature Receives “Disappropriation” Plan

By the time you receive this newsletter, Oregon House and Senate leaders will have released their final plan to deal with this year’s budget shortfall. Because of the plummeting economic conditions that began in the fall, our projected tax revenues have declined steadily. We’re not collecting as much money as we need to balance the books for this current fiscal year (which we are constitutionally required to do). At this point that means a combination of cuts (“disappropriating” funds that had been previously appropriated as part of this year’s budget) and judicious use of reserves.

We are currently looking at a gap of \$855 million for this year and (the even scarier number) \$3 billion for the next biennium. This is worse than anticipated for this point and has us really worried about the next forecast—the one in May, on which the 2009-11 budget will be based. We may well have to come up with hundreds of millions of dollars more at that time.

So, the Legislature has been working hard to come to agreement on how to deal with the current shortfall. If we do nothing, then the Governor is required to apply 5% cuts across the board (which at this point in the year would mean a devastating 20-25% of what little the agencies and schools have left in their budgets). That is unacceptable. The Governor is very reluctant to dip into the reserves and the Federal stimulus money (which like the reserves are “one-time,” nonrenewable funds) at this point. That is understandable given the enormity of what we are facing in May and in the next biennium. But doing nothing is also unacceptable.

The House and Senate Ways and Means Co-Chairs worked hard to put together a budget that used

some of the Federal stimulus money to avoid major cuts. The initial cut to schools of more than \$300 million was reduced to a little over \$100 million. Still, that was too much for most of us to stomach, and we urged our leadership to push for further reductions. A letter was sent by the ten “freshmen” legislators (a group that I’m part of) urging the Legislative leadership and the Governor to move further in the effort to maintain school days. Many, many school advocates also made the case with great vigor. As a result, we were able to see positive movement.

The final plan reduces the K-12 cuts roughly by half by setting up a \$51 million “School Day Restoration Fund,” with money distributed according to the school formula. The hope is that this fund will “buy back” half of the projected cut days, with the districts finding ways to come up with the other half.

I know that many of you wish that we would dip further into the stimulus money and other reserves in order for the State to fully eliminate the shortfall. I agree with you. But I do also understand the concern about holding onto as many resources as possible for the big declines that we expect in May and the huge shortfall that begins after July 1. Those were the two competing forces in these negotiations, and essentially a halfway point was struck. As is always the case in negotiations of this sort, one pushes for the best deal possible. I believe that this is that deal.

The plan will go through committees this week, then be voted on by the House and the Senate next week. Then we’ll immediately start on the 2009-11 budget, which is going to be even harder. It’s going to be essential to find added revenue both from corporate and from individual sources, and you’ll hear more about that from me. Also, we need to do something about Oregon’s kicker law. We heard from the State Economist that if he’s just a little off in his calculation and the economy improves a little earlier, we’ll be sending out kicker checks even as we’re reeling under significant budget cuts. It’s crazy, and it needs to be changed.

I’ll let you know more about the ongoing process in next week’s newsletter.

FACE Legislation Gets First Hearing

The Education Committee held a public hearing on HB2557 on Friday of last week. The bill, also known as the Faculty and College Excellence Act, addresses a number of issues relating to the increasing percentage of college courses being taught by part-time instructors. As colleges shift work away from full-time, tenure track faculty, it has created a situation where there is almost an incentive to expand course offerings on the back of part-timers, who do not receive pro-rata pay, or anywhere near the same level of benefits that full-time instructors have.

The committee heard testimony from a number of part-time instructors who spoke about the difficulties of living within the world of the “freeway flyer” – teachers who cobble together a full-time load by teaching a course or two at several different institutions, and are constantly on the move to get to their next class. There was also testimony from frustrated students, who had difficulty finding time to meet with instructors who were rushing off to their next teaching destination.

As an instructor at Portland Community College, these are issues that I’ve been all too aware of for many years. Part-time instructors are an asset to the colleges, but we can’t accept a situation where fewer and fewer course hours are taught by full-time faculty. We have to provide teachers with the support they need to educate our students. It’s my hope that this hearing will lead to a productive discussion of some of the positive things we can do here that won’t have a big financial cost, while

taking steps toward long-term improvement.

Constituent Coffee & Town Hall

You have a chance to come meet with me today at 4pm in the cafeteria at PCC-Cascade. I will also be holding a coffee this Saturday, February 28th from 9:30-11am at Cam's Coffee Company, located at 6033 NE Win Sivers Dr. The coffee shop is just off Airport Way, near the McDonalds. If you're not able to come to either event please check out my weekly video. I hope to see you there!