



State Representative **Michael Dembrow**



March 3, 2009

Dear Friends and Constituents,

Much of the focus at the Legislature this week remains final approval of the plan to balance this year's budget. The Senate should be voting on it today, with the House voting on it later this week.

The final plan is not perfect. It includes some cuts that I wish we didn't have to make. But it is a responsible, forward-looking plan. Part of the agreement is that if we come up short again in the May forecast for this biennium, we will look to the reserves and make no more cuts. So, while these cuts are painful, the agencies at least know what they will have between now and June 30.

Next year, however, is a different story. As I reported last week, we are currently facing a nearly \$3 billion projected shortfall for the 2009-11 biennium. The work on that budget begins immediately. We'll be looking at a combination of cuts, use of the reserves and federal stimulus money, and possibilities for new revenue. We're also going to be working on long-term changes to help us with this and future crises—for example, much-needed changes to the kicker law.

Transparency and Accountability

One of the themes that I've heard again and again from constituents is a need to make the work of government and the work of business more transparent, easier for us to understand, and clearer about the consequences of the decisions that we make. Consumers and clients ought to have a better understanding of the options that are out there for them and the costs that they are being asked to bear.

At the same time, we need better accountability in making sure that public money is being used in the way that it is intended. This is particularly important with the federal stimulus money coming to Oregon—we need to make sure that the money is spent the way it is intended and not just setting workers up for short-term dead-end jobs.

I have chief sponsored and co-sponsored a number of bills intended to enhance transparency and accountability. Some of them are discussed below, and we'll spotlight others in future editions of the newsletter.

Bill “Drop” Deadline Passes

This Monday was the final day for legislators to introduce, or “drop”, bills into the process for consideration this session. There was a lot of hectic activity as people sought out co-sponsors at the last minute before turning their measures in to the Chief Clerk of the House.

When the dust settled, close to 1500 measures had been introduced by House members. Throughout the rest of the session, we will use the newsletter to highlight bills that I am co-sponsoring. I'll start out this week with five of the measures that I introduced and Chief Sponsored. I will provide the bill

numbers for reference, but they won't be available online until they're officially printed sometime next week.

HB 3317

Currently, if a community college wants to create new courses within an existing program, they have to go through what is termed an 'adverse impact' process if there is a private college offering similar courses nearby. This process can make it difficult for the colleges to offer the affordable programs that workers in high-demand industries need. The goal of this bill is to give public colleges more flexibility to offer in-demand courses to students by removing the adverse impact process for situations where a college is not creating a new degree program.

HB 3164

Oregon income tax law includes a tax expenditure that allows employers to provide a higher tax-free benefit for parking (\$230/mo) than for transit passes or vanpooling (\$120/mo). This bill equalizes both benefits at the \$120/mo level. The result will be some dedicated funding for alternative transit programs, and a removal of the economic incentive for employees to drive to work.

HB 3165

Some state agencies use inmate labor from the state prison system to answer their phones when Oregonians call in. The goal of this bill is to require agencies that do so to provide a public disclosure on their website next to their phone number. The bill would also require these agencies to produce a report detailing the amount of work done by inmates, and the procedures in place to ensure the safety of the public's personal information.

HB 3166

This bill would increase transparency of Education Service Districts by requiring that ESDs provide a clear-cut accounting of all their different funding sources and programs, and essentially allow the public to "connect the dots" and follow each dollar from its source to its expenditure.

HB 3249

This legislation creates a new tool for the State Board of Forestry and the Department of State Lands. It would allow them to designate and manage certain areas of state forestland as Natural Resource Conservation Areas. This new designation, if applied, would result in better protection of fish and wildlife habitat, drinking water sources and old-growth forests, while still providing opportunities for "low-impact public uses" such as hiking or kayaking.

I will continue to keep you updated as these bills move through the process.

Getting Returning Vets Into the Workforce

At my request, the House Workforce Development Committee held a special hearing last week on strategies for helping military men and women enter or re-enter the workforce upon completion of their deployments. As many of you know, I was an early opponent of the war in Iraq, but I deeply appreciate the incredibly difficult work and sacrifices made by the soldiers and their families, particularly those who have been subject to multiple deployments. They deserve to be treated with the utmost respect and appreciation.

At the same time, they bring great potential to us as we seek to build our skilled workforce. Many of them have acquired valuable skills in training and deployment, and we need to figure out better ways to get that training credentialed and transferred to ongoing education back home. As usual, it is hard to

get different systems (e.g., the military and systems of higher education) to coordinate with one another. I'm happy to report that the community colleges here in Oregon are starting to work on making this transition smoother.

We also heard about a program in the skilled construction trades called "Helmets to Hardhats" that is doing great work in getting veterans transitioned into apprenticeship programs upon their return.

If you have any questions about any of these programs, please give my office a call.

Constituent Coffee

I have been enjoying getting to know my constituents at our coffees. I appreciate being asked tough questions about my positions and encourage everyone who has a chance to stop by my next coffee. We will be exploring the Cully neighborhood on Saturday, March 14th from 9:30-11am. Please join us at AJ Java at 4502 NE 42nd.

My staff, Logan Gilles and Alex Berke, are always happy to help if you have any legislative questions or need assistance with access to state services. Please use them as a resource. They can be reached at rep.michaeldembrow@state.or.us or by phone at 503-986-1445.

Hope to see you at our Constituent Coffee!