

Tick, tick, tick

E-Newsletter June 16th 2011

Friends and Neighbors,

The clock is ticking on the 2011 Legislative session, which in all likelihood will be over by the end of next week. Still, between then and now, there remain a number of question marks and disagreements to be overcome. We still need to resolve the Public Safety budget (how to deal with the financial hole created by obligations that Oregon voters created by passing Ballot Measures 57 and 73. Most of the remaining policy bills have been sent down to Joint Ways and Means (the big budget committee), either to be kicked back out to the House and Senate floors for final votes, or to rest for good.

We're still frustrated by the continuing lack of movement on tuition equity, but otherwise it's been a good week for my bills. You can read below about the success of the foster youth tuition waiver bill, which passed overwhelmingly on the House floor yesterday. Even the affordable textbook bill has come back to life and is moving along.

A group of education bills have been packaged together in an effort to get them moving out for floor votes. They include a number of bills that I like and support—including my own HB 3362, the Career/Technical Education bill and the Governor's SB 909, creating a new Education Investment Board. Included also are a bill creating full-day kindergarten in 2015, the beginnings of ESD reform, an appointed State Superintendent of Schools, and an additional \$25 million for K-12 education. There are also some bills that I don't much like related to charter schools, but we're working on amendments that I hope will improve them enough that I can support them. And there are a couple of bills that I will probably be voting against. I'll provide more details next week.

Most of the higher education bills have avoided being part of the package, so they are gradually making their way to the floors.

A Win for Foster Kids!!!

The ongoing saga of HB 3471 continues, and in a good way. After facing a questionable future a couple of months ago, it now looks as if it's going to make all the way into law.

This morning, the House passed HB 3471, my bill to provide financial aid to former Oregon foster youth pursuing higher education. The legislation relieves financial barriers former foster youth currently encounter when they explore college options by granting a waiver for the remaining cost of tuition and fees after all other state and federal aid has been applied.

Research shows that the surest way to break the cycle of generational foster care and all the societal costs that derive from it is to encourage these youth to attend and graduate from college. However, here in Oregon today barely 2% of kids in foster care go on to get bachelor's degrees. HB 3471 sends a clear message to foster youth that they have an option for breaking this cycle, a

clear path to success in college—if they are willing to do what it takes to get into college, go to college, and stay in college.

They also bear some responsibility with this legislation. In order to qualify, foster youth will serve a minimum of 30 hours of community service activities such as mentoring foster youth or assisting in the provision of peer support activities. It's an important piece of an important bill that I hope will empower more of our foster youth to go to college and go on to do great things.

I was particularly inspired by many current and former foster youth who have been working to get this bill passed all session long. They are a testament to the kinds of things that can be achieved when we give kids an opportunity. That's what HB 3471 is about, and I was proud to sponsor this bill and lead the floor debate on it today.

HB 3471 now moves to the Senate for consideration. It previously passed the Ways & Means Committee on a unanimous vote, so its prospects for final passage look really, really good.

Legislature Passes Redistricting Bill

For the first time in thirty years, the Legislature came to agreement on a proposal to redraw our own district lines. As you know, every ten years the districts are redrawn after the Census to account for population shifts and ensure equal representation in each district. It's often a contentious, politically-charged process. In 1991 and 2001, the Legislature failed to come to an agreement and the lines were drawn by the Secretary of State. This year, leaders of the redistricting effort came up with a bi-partisan approval that was able to pass both chambers, and was signed by the Governor earlier this week.

[You can view the new district maps here.](#) As for our district, you won't see much change. We now extend a little bit further south, crossing I-84, and the north boundary isn't quite as far north. They are minor tweaks that, in my opinion, retain the distinctive character of the district. It was important to me that Maywood Park remained whole, and we achieved that. I also continue to represent the Parkrose area, which I'm pleased with.

While we passed a legislative redistricting plan, we have not yet dealt with Congressional redistricting. That conversation continues, but every day that passes lessens the odds that we'll come to an agreement before the end of session. That one may well end up in the courts, but the likelihood is that the congressional map won't be too much different from the one that we have today.

Employment News Remains Positive

The latest Oregon jobs report, issued this week, shows a continued positive trend. Our state unemployment rate fell from 9.5% in April to 9.3% in May, and is now essentially the same as the nationwide jobless rate. We added 1,300 jobs in May, following a gain of 1,100 in April. [You can read the release from the Employment Department here.](#)

Cool Schools Sails Through House

On Monday, the House unanimously passed HB 2960, the Governor's Cool Schools legislation. The legislation establishes a fund in the Oregon Department of Energy that will provide grants and low-interest loans to school districts for energy efficiency retrofits and seismic upgrades. Cool Schools will move us toward more energy efficient, safer school buildings for our kids while saving districts money on utility bills and putting Oregonians back to work. It's a great program. I've played a supportive role on the plan since its inception, but it's two other Portland representatives, Reps. Jefferson Smith and Jules Bailey, who deserve special recognition for their work with the Governor to get this through.

Foreclosure Legislation Stalled

Tim Collette, a homeowner and father of a soldier serving in Iraq, testified in front of the Joint Ways and Means Committee earlier this month to share his experience with his bank during the before and during the foreclosure process (you may view the video here: <http://www.homecomingwithoutahome.com>).

Tim paid his bills on time. In fact, everything he owns has been paid off with the exception of his house, which he paid a large down payment on since he was able to. When we entered the current recession, Tim's business struggled and he became unable to sustain the same level of payments on his mortgage and so he applied for a loan modification. While waiting to receive a decision for his loan modification (which he followed up on many times by contacting his bank), he was informed his bank was starting the foreclosure process on his house. Tim's son will be coming home for a 15-day leave from Iraq in August and all he wants to do is go home and sleep in his own bed; Tim's house is slated to be auctioned within the next couple days.

Unfortunately, Tim's story is not unfamiliar. Many homeowners are struggling to negotiate with banks to keep their homes. An estimated 96 foreclosure starts occur every day in Oregon; over 85,500 Oregonians are projected to be foreclosed on during the period 2009-2012. A bill that was passed in the 2009 session, SB 628, provides some protections to consumers surrounding the notification process which banks must abide by. However, SB 628 will sunset and no longer be in effect after this year.

Senator Suzanne Bonamici introduced SB 826 this session, which would improve servicer accountability, create fair rules regarding the application of payments, help ensure that all options are exhausted and that foreclosure is a last resort and increase accountability and oversight. Currently, SB 826 is in the Ways and Means Committee and has not been scheduled to move to the floor of the House.

Another bill, [SB 827](#) provides help for struggling homeowners by clarifying, streamlining, and strengthening the state's foreclosure laws. Among other things, it (1) requires a lender to prove that it notified a borrower of the right to request a modification; (2) limits what's known as a "dual-track"—working with borrowers on a mortgage modification plan while at the same time pursuing foreclosure; and (3) makes failure to comply with the law's provisions a violation of the Unlawful Trade Practices Act. SB 827 passed the Senate on May 25th and is currently in the House Rules Committee and has not been scheduled to move the floor of the House.

It is my hope that these two bills will find a path this session. These protections for Oregonians are desperately needed.

To find out more about the foreclosure process, the federal loan modification “making Home Affordable” program, events and workshops, Oregon’s foreclosure laws and a list of resources, please visit <http://foreclosurehelp.oregon.gov/>. Contact our office if you want further information.

Farewell Dr. Ski!

Last week I got to go to an event that definitely provoked mixed feelings for me, a farewell party for Dr. John “Ski” Sygielski, who has been president of Mount Hood Community College for the last few years. Ski is leaving to become president at Harrisburg Area Community College in Pennsylvania. It’s a real gain for that college, but a real loss for MHCC and many residents of our district.

Ski has been a real breath of fresh air for Mount Hood—full of energy, compassion, warmth, and good sense. I always really appreciated his support and his advice—as the Chair of the Board of the American Association of Community Colleges last year, he carried a wealth of information and national perspective on educational issues. He attended many of the coffees that I’ve held at Mount Hood’s Maywood Park campus, and it was always great to have him there. We were blessed to have him.

His new college brings him much closer to his family in neighboring Ohio, and I know that this has long been his goal. So I can’t say too much bad about his leaving. But I will say that I’ll miss him and wish him the best.

Explorando el Columbia Slough This Saturday

This weekend, Columbia Slough Watershed Council is putting on their annual event “Explorando el Columbia Slough.” I’ve attended for the past two years, and I’m planning on being there again this Saturday. The event is bilingual and will feature activities in Spanish and English for all ages. Explorando is free, and includes guided canoe trips, live music, folk dancing, storytelling, arts & crafts, workshops, and more. You don’t need to register, and the events start at 1 PM on Saturday afternoon. [Click here for more information.](#)

Next Weekend: Cully Neighborhood Roll & Stroll

Come gather with neighbors and community groups on Saturday, June 25 to celebrate the new Cully Boulevard street improvements. Residents can take a walk, roll or bike while talking with City staff about the future of the Cully Main Street area and local transportation issues in Cully. The “Roll and Stroll” starts at the “five corners” – Cully Blvd./Prescott/57th/60th – and goes from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Adults, families and neighbors can also enjoy community booths, refreshments and opportunities to meet and greet others. [Click here for more information.](#)

Celebrating a Fine Team

Earlier this week we snapped a Team Dembrow 2011 picture, which you'll see above. Portland State interns Donilee and Dane are flanking the group, with my legislative aides Logan and Michelle in the middle. It's been great working with all of them this session. Even though Logan didn't get the message to wear a tie that day, I still proclaim it to be a fine looking group.

Until next week,
Michael