

Big News on Tuition Equity

E-Newsletter June 2nd, 2011

Friends and Neighbors,

This week I've got a quick update on several bills of interest, as well as big news on Tuition Equity. Also, don't forget the constituent coffee this Saturday (details at the end of this email).

BPA Discharge Petition Fails; New Bill Introduced

For those of you following the bill that would ban Bisphenol-A in baby bottles and sippy cups, the news yesterday was not great. Rep. Cannon's attempt to bring the bill to the House floor for a vote failed to garner the needed 31 signatures. However, Rep. Brian Clem has re-introduced the legislation along with three other Representatives. The new BPA bill is HB 3689, and it should be referred to the Rules Committee early next week. Hopefully, this new vehicle will succeed in finding its way the floor, where I look forward to casting my "aye" vote.

[OPB has coverage of the new bill here.](#)

More Budgets Move Through Ways & Means

The budget-writing process continued this week, as subcommittees continued to move agency budget bills up to the full Ways & Means committee. The Education subcommittee that I sit on moved the budgets for the Community Colleges, Oregon University System, OHSU, and the Oregon Student Assistance Commission. This morning, the subcommittee also passed out HB 3418, a bill that I've mentioned in previous newsletters. It creates a Task Force on Higher Education Student and Institutional Success to examine and recommend performance metrics, methods and funding options for higher education. I see it as an integral part of the higher education reform process that the legislature is looking at with SB 242, which is slated to move out early next week from the subcommittee.

Banking Industry Tries to Pull a Fast One

Our own State Senator, Jackie Dingfelder, went toe-to-toe with the financial industry this week and won.

Earlier this session, she introduced SB 519, a bill that will protect Oregon's affordable housing stock from the foreclosure crisis. Here's an excerpt from the good Senator's floor speech on that bill:

"In Oregon, individual donors, private foundations, and governments at all levels make significant investments in charitable nonprofit organizations that sell affordable homes to low- and moderate-income families. To protect this public investment, charitable organizations attach an affordable housing covenant to the homes they sell. The affordable housing covenant ensures community control of a public investment and reserves affordable homes for low- and moderate-income Oregon families."

Foreclosure typically terminates affordable housing covenants, putting the community at risk of losing these affordable homes. SB 519 addresses this by ensuring that charitable organizations can rescue these homes from foreclosure to protect the public's investment without interfering with payment to lenders."

Last week, banking and financial interests tried to hijack the bill by attaching an amendment to weaken state recording requirements for properties in foreclosure. Lobbyists made a big push to get this amendment into the legislation, but Sen. Dingfelder and others successfully fought back and the Judiciary Committee passed SB 519 yesterday without the amendment. Kudos to Sen. Dingfelder for her good work.

[You can read the Oregonian's coverage here.](#)

A New Path Forward for Tuition Equity

Yesterday afternoon I initiated the process of creating a "discharge petition" to bring SB 742, the tuition equity bill, out of the committee where it has been trapped and onto a path to a vote by the full House. The discharge petition is a process that House members created at the beginning of this session to prevent good bills from getting bottled up in committee. If a majority of legislators believe that a bill is worthy of a vote, then it can be moved directly to the floor.

I believe that SB 742, which passed the Senate on an 18-11 vote at the end of March, deserves a vote. That's why I started the discharge petition process, and why I coauthored an op-ed with Rep. Bob Jenson that we submitted to the Oregonian yesterday. **We expect it will be run tomorrow in the paper, but here's the special sneak-preview edition just for you:**

We are the chief House of Representatives sponsors of SB 742, which would allow the children of undocumented immigrants to become eligible for in-state tuition if they make it into an Oregon university.

You might wonder why a Republican from Eastern Oregon and a Democrat from Northeast Portland are the chief sponsors in the Oregon House of Representatives of SB 742. The answer is simple. Between us, we have taught Oregon community college students for sixty years. We know these students, we know their potential, and we know how much Oregon would benefit from giving them this shot at a university education.

These are potential health care professionals, engineers, social workers, teachers, valuable assets for this state. They are that good. They've been leaders in their schools, in their churches, and in their communities and have overcome many obstacles to get where they are.

However, even though they've grown up in Oregon, attended school here, graduated from an Oregon high school, and done all that it takes to be accepted by an Oregon public university, they are unable to attend. As a result of their parents' documentation status, they are not considered to be Oregon residents and so must pay more than three times the in-state tuition rate that their peers pay. And this they cannot afford to do.

Federal law allows this tuition roadblock to be lifted **IF** a state passes tuition-equity legislation, and over the last ten years, the legislatures of thirteen states have voted to do so: Texas, New Mexico, California, Washington, Illinois, New York, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Oklahoma, Utah, Kansas, Maryland (just last month) and Connecticut (just last week). These are both red states and blue states. We believe that it is time for Oregon to join them.

Those who oppose tuition equity conjure up a variety of nightmare scenarios if we pass this bill. However, if we look at the states that have passed tuition equity, we see little to support those fears. These states have not been flooded by increased numbers of illegal workers relative to other states. Native-born residents have not been shut out. They have not seen any drain on their state coffers. In fact, they have experienced increased tuition revenue as a result of tuition equity. Many of the previously undocumented young people in those states are now citizens or on a real path to citizenship.

Opponents also say that it rewards lawbreakers. These kids are not lawbreakers. They were brought to this country at a young age. They are examples of exactly what we want our young people to do—work hard, get good grades, dream big. They are exactly the kind of kids we should be investing in. Many have lived here virtually their entire lives. They have no other country to go to. They have plenty to offer this state.

But unfortunately, they have become the collateral damage of this country's failed immigration policy. That's wrong, and it's not the American way. In this country, we don't punish children for the actions of their parents. We reward hard work.

These kids are not asking for any kind of handout. Unlike their native-born high school classmates, they're not going to receive any state or federal scholarships, no extra benefits of any kind. They are going to have to pay the full cost of that in-state tuition themselves. All they're asking for is access, and a chance to repay the people of this state for the investment we have made in them.

Sixty years as Oregon educators have convinced us this is the right thing to do and the right time to do it.

Rep. Michael Dembrow, House District 45

Rep. Bob Jenson, House District 58

Stay tuned for more on this.

Don't forget to join me and Jackie Dingfelder this coming Saturday for coffee!

The weather looks to be pretty nice on Saturday. I may even get out the old 18-speed for the trip out to Maywood Park--hope you'll join us!

WHAT: Coffee with Michael Dembrow and Jackie Dingfelder

WHEN: Saturday, June 4th from 10-11:30 AM

WHERE: MHCC Maywood Park campus (corner of NE 102nd & Prescott) Room 223 (upstairs)

See you then,

Michael