

Making News With Single-Payer Advocates

E-Newsletter March 15th 2011

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Last week was an action-packed one in the Capitol, and I look forward to sharing some of it with you in this newsletter. In last week's newsletter I mentioned the debate and vote over whether or not Oregon should reconnect to the federal tax code. In this issue I want to talk about the ongoing effort to restructure our colleges and universities, and I'll let you know about a bill that I've sponsored to make sure that the public mission of our universities is maintained as we do the restructuring. I'm especially pleased to let you know about the big rally and hearing for HB 3510, the Affordable Health Care for All Oregon Act, which occurred on Friday. I also want to let you know why I voted no on HB 2287, a bill that seeks to change the way that charter schools are sponsored by local districts.

You'll also see some exciting news about one of my favorite schools in the district, Jason Lee Elementary.

Finally, one of the things going on this week is another visit with interns from Gilkey International Middle School. Every session, students from this school spend two days with various legislators who have offered to take them on, and I'm pleased to be able to do so again. My students this week will be Harrison Roberts and Quentin Hahn. I look forward to showing them the ropes and giving them an inside view of daily life in the Capitol.

I love how open and accessible our Capitol and legislative process is here in the Beaver State, and I want to allow constituents to see first-hand our democracy at work. We're just people, faced with tough decisions, but we're doing our best. It's important for young people to see that first-hand. If you have children or know of any students that would like to have this kind of experience, please let me know. My office would be happy to host them for a day.

A Responsible Approach to Charter Schools

Public charter schools are schools that receive public funding and are generally accountable to local school districts, but which in many ways act like private schools. Many of them are doing a great job of utilizing experimental teaching methodologies to have success with students who were not very successful in mainstream schools (that was their original purpose). But in many cases they are skimming the most talented kids and the most engaged parents away from the mainstream neighborhood schools where they are needed. Various tensions have emerged from that--and often

these tensions have gotten wrapped up in ideology and partisan rhetoric. That's unfortunate.

Yesterday morning on the House floor, I voted no on a bill that purported to make some "modest" improvements to our charter school law. It was a bill that came before us a few weeks ago on the House Education Committee, and I voted against it then, because a careful analysis of the bill showed that these "modest improvements" in fact set us up for some very dangerous outcomes.

Yesterday, I voted against the bill on the floor of the House when it came up for a vote, and I spoke against it. [You can read my statement of opposition here](#). You can [check out the Register-Guard's coverage of the vote here](#).

I'm a strong supporter of charter schools when they are done right. In an earlier newsletter you can read my very favorable assessment of the Ivy School, a charter school in our district that uses the Montessori method to help kids learn and which has utilized an aggressive community outreach program to bring in a very diverse student body. That's exactly what a charter school should do. Unfortunately, many don't take that approach. Many charter schools operations are simply out-of-state companies trying to get access to state resources to make a buck. We should not be investing our precious state resources in them.

This legislative session is raising some very interesting questions about what exactly we expect from our public school system and from our locally elected school boards. I appreciate the opportunity to clarify my own thoughts about how neighborhood public schools can and should be the anchors of their communities, and how we must support them to be the best that they can be.

Single-Payer Rally and Hearing Draw Crowds

Last Friday, a bevy of single-payer health care supporters flooded the steps, hallways and hearing rooms of the Capitol. During the noon rally we heard from legislators, community leaders and community members about their experiences with our current expensive, broken health care system and how single-payer would benefit our society by allowing all Oregonians access to affordable quality health care.

After the rally, advocates headed into the Capitol building to meet with their legislators; many had very productive conversations about the need for a system which allows every Oregonian access to health care at an affordable price and asked their legislators for their support for House Bill 3510, the Affordable Health Care for All Oregon Act.

At the public hearing in the Health Care Committee later in the afternoon, hundreds of supporters filled crowded into overflow hearing rooms. I spoke on the first panel to explain the bill and why I'm such a strong supporter of the single-payer concept; [you can watch a video of my testimony here](#). For over 40 minutes the committee heard from doctors, specialists, business owners, organizations and labor unions about the necessity to lower the cost of our current health care system by reducing administrative overhead, untying employment from health coverage and extending coverage to all. It was a very moving public hearing and I want to thank all those who attended and those who had the courage to share their often heartbreakingly stories.

I want to thank the members of the single-payer coalition for their countless hours of incredible hard work helping to draft the language of the bill, talking with legislators and organizing events like the one on Friday. Most, if not all, of the people involved with this effort have been committed to health care reform for many, many years and I appreciate the expertise, guidance and support they have given to this cause.

The events on Friday also attracted a significant amount of media attention, including [The Corvallis Gazette Times](#), [The Oregonian](#), and a recent article in [the Lund Report](#).

I look forward to continuing the conversation about single-payer health care and will keep you in the loop about where this bill is going. Stay tuned for details!

Higher Ed Restructuring – And the Need to Focus on Student Success

For almost a year now, some of us in the Legislature have been taking a hard look at how we can make access to higher education more of a priority in the state. A bipartisan workgroup was created last summer to examine and recommend a variety of changes. Some of those recommended changes have taken the form of Senate Bill 242, which is based on a set of proposals coming from the Oregon University System. It does two big things: (a) it changes OUS from a state agency, subject to thousands of state regulations and requirements, into a true public university system, with the ability to put more money into the classroom without having to come to the Legislature for permission; and (b) it brings our universities and community colleges much closer together in terms of planning, coordination, and articulation.

After receiving some important, positive amendments, SB 242 passed out of the Senate Education Committee last week, and is now headed to the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Education (of which I'm one of the Co-Vice Chairs). This was a very important move.

In moving OUS from state agency status, the Legislature is, in effect, lightening its hand on the universities and giving more authority to the Oregon State Board of

Higher Education. I think that's a good thing. It will allow our universities to have more of the flexibility and creativity that our community colleges have. That doesn't in any way mean that we're releasing them from their obligations as public universities. We're not. We have to remain exceedingly clear on what we continue to expect from our universities and our community colleges in performing their public mission for Oregonians. We must maintain oversight mechanisms that will guarantee ongoing affordability, access, and success for Oregon's students, and clarity that our colleges and universities are benefiting Oregon, through their research enterprises and their ability to create a skilled workforce with the ability to think critically and be engaged civically.

And that's why I've introduced HB 3418, the Higher Education Student and Institutional Success Act, which received a public hearing before our Higher Education Subcommittee on Thursday. This bill is an integral part of the Higher Ed reform effort, and I hope will soon be joining SB 242 in Ways and Means. To learn more about it, [read my testimony before the Higher Education Committee](#).

Jason Lee Elementary Honored

One of my favorite schools (other than PCC) was featured in the Oregonian last week - Jason Lee Elementary School, a K-8 school located in the southern flanks of Rocky Butte in our district, was recognized for their improvements toward closing the achievement gap. I encourage you to [read the article and learn more about the good work going on at Jason Lee](#).

I was already familiar with Jason Lee -- last October I was invited to attend a special celebration there, recognizing a partnership between the school and rural agriculture growers and workers. Our lunch featured grass-fed beef from Wallowa County, tomatoes grown in Albany and Apples from Parkdale. I had a great time with the kids. 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.

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Until next week,

Michael