

# Onward and Upward: Bills Start to Move

**E-Newsletter** March 23rd 2011

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

Spring is here, and bills are starting to move out of the House and Senate committees, en route to votes on the floor. I'll report on some of them in this newsletter, along with others just getting their first hearings. The time for hearings is starting to run short: we're about three weeks away from the time that any bill that is going to have any life in it must be posted for a committee vote. The anxiety level of sponsors and advocates is starting to rise accordingly.

We are also close to the time that the 2011-13 Legislature's proposed budget framework will be announced. This is the Legislature's initial reworking of the Governor's recommended budget. You can read more about it below.

Finally, I'm so very happy to report that Kiki has returned home at last, after nearly three months of hospital and rehabilitation. She obviously still has a lot of healing to do, but her spirits are great, and every day she can do a little more. Thanks again to all of you for your concern, your support, and your best wishes. It has really kept me going throughout this ordeal.

She's asleep beside me now, the room filled with the sweet smell of freshly-cut daphne. Life is good.

## **Budget Framework to Be Released Soon**

The Ways and Means Co-Chairs (Senator Richard Devlin from Lake Oswego, Representative Peter Buckley from Ashland, and Representative Dennis Richardson from Myrtle Point) are finishing work on the broad contours of the 2011-13 budget, which will be announced at the end of next week.

This is much earlier than is usually the case. Generally, the Co-Chairs don't release their budget until after the May revenue forecast, so all of the agency presentations and public testimony come in response to the Governor's proposed budget. (Some elements of the Governor's budget will be reflected in the Co-Chairs' budget, others not.) As a result of this change, this time the budget debate during April, May, and June will be much more "real-world." It will be interesting to see what the effects of this different approach will be.

As in nearly every other state, Oregon's revenues for the next biennium are woefully inadequate to deal with all the needs that are out there. This is due to the recession and

the triple impact of unemployment (causing fewer taxes to come in), higher demand for public services, and funding gaps caused by the use of one-time federal stimulus dollars in the current biennium that will not be available for 11-13. We're hoping that the worst is behind us and that we're slowly recovering, but we're not there yet. Big cuts will be needed in the three primary budget areas in the General Fund -- Education (pre-K, K-12, community colleges, and universities), Health/Human Services, and Public Safety.

Though we don't yet know the specifics of the Co-Chairs' budget, we know that it will require difficult, painful decisions to be made. We obviously need to protect the most vulnerable. Does that mean that we give less to schools? How much should college tuition be allowed to rise? Given our inadequate resources, do we spend all that we have, or do we keep some in reserve in case the economy suddenly deteriorates again? If so, how much do we keep in reserve? When do we decide to dip into the reserves?

My own inclination is to push for a balanced approach that uses enough of the reserves to avoid the deepest of the cuts, but leaves enough in reserve to avoid even more devastating cuts if the economy worsens. This is no easy task. As always, I appreciate your input as we go through this. I'll provide you with the details on the Co-Chairs' budget as soon as it comes out.

### **Tuition Equity Bill Heads to Senate Floor**

Last Thursday, students and members of the public filled the Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee for a work session on SB 742, the Tuition Equity bill. Committee members passed the bill out of committee by a 4-1 vote, sending it to the Senate Floor with a "do pass" recommendation.

This is a HUGE step forward for this legislation. Advocates have been working to get Tuition Equity in Oregon for over a decade now (during which time 11 other states have instituted it), and the last time a Tuition Equity bill made it out of committee and to a floor vote was during the 2003 session. I want to express my gratitude to the many students who have worked so hard to get the bill this far, all the advocates who have spent countless hours organizing and talking to their legislators, and to Michelle from my office for taking the lead on this issue and herding the cats necessary to get us to this point. There's a LOT of work left to do, so we can't rest on our laurels—but we can be proud of what we've done so far. I certainly am.

I expect the full Senate to vote on SB 742 within the next next two weeks, and I'll keep you posted as the bill moves toward the House and its next step in the process.

## **Career and Technical Education Bill on the Move**

Today is a big day for an issue that I've been working on closely for the last two years. HB 3362, legislation that I developed with Labor Commissioner Brad Avakian, will be up for its first hearing in the House Education Committee. HB 3362 will increase the availability of career and technical education in our K-12 schools, especially in the high school years. This legislation is the fruition of the Career and Technical Education Task Force that I served on during the interim, as well as the ongoing efforts of a lot of great folks in the trades, the education world, and the industry side to bring this hands-on education back into the schools.

Commissioner Avakian has been a great leader on this issue, and I'm happy to be able to partner with him on this bill. HB 3362 has wide bipartisan support, with nearly two thirds of the legislature signed on as sponsors and eight Chief Sponsors (which is nearly unheard of), equally split between both parties and both chambers of the legislature.

We know that it's been a struggle to keep "shop" and other career-focused programs open in the public schools after years of cuts to elective programs. We know that these important programs feed students into high-skill, highwage jobs in the building trades sector and other Oregon industries that cannot be outsourced—and we know that both labor and industry representatives want to help bring these course offerings back to the public schools. With all this in mind, I think we've put together a great bill that is going to make it easier for districts to collaborate with other districts; with labor; and with industry partners to provide career & tech education. If we can get some money set aside, the bill also sets up a small grant program to help districts get innovative CTE programs off the ground.

I'm looking forward to the hearing this afternoon, and I'll report back to you next week on how it goes.

## **Helping Our Foster Youth Succeed**

Yesterday the House Higher Education Subcommittee heard House Bill 3471, a bipartisan bill that I introduced with my Republican colleague Rep. Matt Wingard. HB 3471 would grant tuition waivers for Oregon foster youth. Currently, most youth who age out of foster care have little to no support to complete post-secondary education. Without family financial contributions and no one to co-sign a loan, attaining a college degree is unlikely. Only 25% of former foster youth 18-25 attend college and only 6% of the 25% who attend college achieve a 2 or 4-year diploma.

Although the financial barriers to attaining a higher education for foster youth are a major deterrent, foster youth also experience a lack of emotional support during their

post-secondary education and this point was made abundantly clear at the hearing as former and present foster youth testified in front of the committee. House Bill 3471 will help foster youth attain a higher education by removing the financial barriers and requiring those who are eligible for the tuition waiver to provide at least 30 hours per year in support services to former foster youth on campus to help them transition into life without a guardian.

The public hearing yesterday was powerful. We heard from foster youth across the state. A current UO student named Jamie talked about her struggle to find housing while working two jobs and taking a full course load, saying that her grades were low but good enough to stay in school and that had to be her focus. Jamie also said that since the state is the guardian of foster youth the state should want to see its children succeed. Another student, Sam, explained that foster youth are aware of that struggle and lack the financial and emotional support to feel they can make it through college. For Deedee, another young woman who came to testify, it was her birthday and the last day she would be in the foster care system--everyone in the room sang happy birthday to her. Representatives from the Oregon University System; the Oregon Community College Association; Portland Community College; Youth, Rights and Justice; and other community advocates testified in front of the committee.

I'm hopeful we can get this bill voted out of committee within the next two weeks. As always, I'll keep you updated.

### **BPA-Free Legislation Treks Onward, Upward**

As you'll recall, there was quite a scuffle during the February 2010 session over a bill that would have banned Bisphenol-A, a suspected endocrine-disrupting chemical, from plastic water bottles and baby sippy cups. That bill stalled on the floor of the Senate when it came up for a vote and tied 15-15. Fast forward to today, and an updated version of the legislation is poised to move out of a Senate committee soon.

SB 695, which had a hearing last week in the Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee, is expected to be amended slightly before moving to the Senate floor for a full vote. The bill, with amendments, will do three basic things:

- Prohibit BPA in children's beverage containers (baby bottles and sippy cups) and reusable bottles (sports water bottles),
- Direct that WIC-approved formula have no more than 0.1 ppb detectable BPA in the formula contained within cans, and

- Establish a BPA-Free advisory group to make recommendations on a voluntary BPA-free label standard for products sold in Oregon.

You've probably already noticed "BPA-Free" labels on water bottles sold in most stores, as industry has moved in this direction due to consumer pressure. However, many baby formula cans (and other canned goods) still use BPA in their lining. SB 695 will continue the move toward eliminating this chemical from products, and I'm hopeful we can get it passed this session.

[Read more information here](#) or contact the office of our State Senator Jackie Dingfelder at [503-986-1723](tel:503-986-1723).

### **For Your Calendar: Senior Town Hall II**

A couple of months ago, I held a Town Hall with Sen. Jackie Dingfelder and neighboring Rep. Ben Cannon that was focused on issues impacting seniors as we headed into the legislative session. Now that we're approaching the halfway point of the session, it's time to come back together and have an update on how legislation and the budget discussions around senior programs are shaping up.

*Please join the three of us for "part two" of the Senior Town Hall on Saturday April 9th. We'll be meeting up at St. Matthew's Episcopal Church (11229 NE Prescott St.) from 10:00 to 11:30 AM. I hope you'll add this important meeting to your calendar.*

We'll also have our regular monthly constituent coffee on Saturday, April 2nd.

More details next week on that.

See you soon,

Michael