

Much Ado About the Budget and CRC

E-Newsletter March 31, 2011

Friends and Neighbors,

It's been a great week in the Legislature.

For me, the highlight was on Tuesday, when the Senate voted 18-11 to pass SB 742, the tuition equity bill. I got to sit in on the floor speeches and witnessed that historic vote. I was the guest of Senator Frank Morse, the Senate's chief sponsor of the bill (see picture below of Sen. Morse and I after the vote). He told the moving story of his own personal journey from opposition to the concept ten years ago to becoming a champion today. We also heard very compelling speeches in support from Senator Suzanne Bonamici, Senator Chris Edwards, Senate Majority Leader Diane Rosenbaum, and Senate President Peter Courtney. Now the bill has moved over to the House, where it will be assigned to a committee and we'll work on setting up a public hearing there.

On Monday morning Senator Rosenbaum and I presented HB 3401 to the House Business and Labor Committee. That too is a bill I'm very passionate about. It would establish a Task Force on Work & Family Life to explore the challenges facing Oregonians as they balance their family responsibilities with their work duties. My hope is that this Task Force will examine policies including paid sick and family leave, flexible work arrangements, access to affordable child care, and protections from employment discrimination. It can inform efforts in future sessions to pass family-friendly legislation, an area that I continue to be interested in.

And tomorrow we expect the Career/Technical Education bill to be passed out of the Education Committee and moved to the Ways and Means Committee. These are all great accomplishments.

In the remainder of this newsletter, you can read about the other major news piece of the week—the release of the Co-Chairs' biennial budget—as well as news about upcoming events. Enjoy!

Constituent Coffee THIS Saturday

With the budget outline now released, this is the time to come and hear the details and voice your thoughts on what programs need to be protected. As I discuss the budget with my colleagues, it's tremendously helpful to let them know what I am hearing

from constituents and folks in the “real” world. So much has happened since the last coffee; we’ve got LOTS to talk about.

We’re trying out a new spot for the constituent coffee **this coming Saturday, April 2nd. Please join me at Fleur De Lis Bakery at 3930 NE Hancock St in the Hollywood district. We will be starting at 9:30 AM, as usual.** Many of you know Fleur De Lis as being in the old library building, across the street from the Hollywood Senior Center.

Hope to see you there!

Co-Chairs’ Budget Outline Released

We moved one step closer to putting together the 2011-2013 state budget this week. The three Co-Chairs of the Ways & Means Committee released an outline of their proposed budget for the coming biennium. This will serve as the framework and the focal point of discussion from now until the end of the session. It also guides the work done in the various budget-writing subcommittees, who will “fill in the blanks,” if you will.

You can [view an outline of the budget proposal here](#). The Co-Chairs have taken a similar approach to that of the Governor, and prepared their budget based on expected available revenue, rather than based on current service levels. “Current service level” refers to what it would cost the state to provide the same level of services that it currently does under the 09-11 budget, with inflation. The gap between expected revenue and the current service level is commonly referred to as the “budget deficit,” though it is not an actual deficit.

By way of comparison, the CSL for the state school fund is \$6.7 billion. The Co-Chairs’ budget allocates \$5.7 billion for the school fund. The CSL for human services is \$5.3 billion (largely due to one-time federal money that is no longer available), while the Co-Chairs’ budget includes \$3.7 billion. While these are the two largest areas of the General Fund budget, they provide an illustration of just how difficult a task we face in deciding how to allocate our scarce resources, and the impossibility of providing the same level of service in the next biennium. You can [find a complete analysis of the CSL from the Legislative Fiscal Office here](#).

As I mentioned in the last newsletter, our goal is to get the K-12 budget finalized and approved by mid-April. Doing so that early would be historic, and would help give local school districts more certainty as they plan for next year. \$5.7 billion is an inadequate number, but the hope is that the economy will continue to improve and the Legislature will feel comfortable releasing more money from our reserves next

February. Many of us are in fact hoping to make that kind of commitment before we finish this June.

We've got a long road ahead of us in filling in this framework with programlevel budget numbers, and a lot of decisions are left to make. Please join me for coffee at Fleur De Lis on Saturday for more details and to give your input.

Columbia River Crossing Memorial Draws Fire

I'm sure that many of you are aware of the proposal to replace the current I-5 bridge over the Columbia, commonly known as the Columbia River Crossing Project (CRC). You are also probably aware that the CRC has generated a lot of controversy. What you may not know is that the legislature has very little direct involvement in the CRC process. The primary drivers thus far have been the Governors and the transportation departments from Oregon and Washington.

House Joint Memorial 22, introduced this session, would formally request that the federal government allocate funds to match dollars invested by Oregon and Washington to build the CRC. It's a fairly short, non-binding memorial that has nonetheless drawn a firestorm of controversy in the Capitol. I've received dozens of emails from constituents, the vast majority of whom are opposed to both the CRC and HJM 22. It seems appropriate for me to address these concerns, and also let you know where my thoughts lie on these issues.

I want to first make it clear that HJM 22 does not endorse a particular plan or design for the CRC. It is agnostic on the number of lanes, the presence of light rail, the number and placement of interchanges on either side of the river, and the design type. All HJM 22 does is to request that once Washington and Oregon have come to agreement on the project details, the federal government provide funding assistance to get the bridge built.

That being said, the public hearings on the Memorial have provided an opportunity for stakeholders, legislators and members of the public to provide their input and their concerns about the past and present direction of the CRC debate. For my part, I signed on to a letter, along with 19 of my colleagues, registering our concerns and unanswered questions. [I'd encourage you to read it for yourself.](#)

The bottom line here is that the current bridge will need to be replaced. It needs seismic improvements, it needs much improved bicycle and pedestrian access and infrastructure, and it needs to provide a light rail link to Vancouver. There is little doubt that the CRC project will be built. It's our job to make certain that we build the right bridge, with the right features, at the right cost. I'm committed to continuing to

engage my constituents in this conversation, and carry your thoughts to the folks who are working on the CRC, as well as to my legislative colleagues.

This is an issue that has incited a lot of passion from members of the community, and I hope that you all remain involved and vocal.

Redistricting Meetings: Have Your Say

Every ten years, following the Census, the legislature redraws the boundaries of the 60 House Districts and 30 Senate Districts in the state. This is a process that involves members from both chambers, and the Governor's office. Committees are working now to adjust boundaries to ensure that all districts contain equal numbers of residents, and are drawn in an impartial fashion that preserves communities of interest. A lot of considerations are at play, including boundaries of incorporated cities, neighborhood boundaries within cities, and communities of color.

As part of this process, legislators will be traveling around the state seeking input from residents. There are two upcoming public meetings in the Portland area that I want to draw your attention to. If you have a chance to attend, please do so. It is important that legislators hear directly from the residents who will be affected by moving district lines.

On Friday, April 8, a public meeting will be held at Portland State University in the Chancellor's Office Boardroom at 2 PM (1800 SW 6th Ave, Room 515). This meeting will focus mostly on districts in the inner part of the city. **On Saturday, April 9**, a meeting will be held at Mount Hood Community College at 9 AM (26000 SE Stark Street, Room 1710). This meeting will focus mostly on districts in the outer east part of the metro area. I encourage you to attend one of these meetings and let your voice be heard.

See you Saturday morning at Fleur De Lis.

Michael