

Good News for Job Growth, Revenue

E-Newsletter May 19th 2011

Dear Friends and Neighbors:

What a difference a week can make! In the last newsletter I reported that we were having a relatively quiet week. The past two weeks have been the exact opposite: full of activity, stress, excitement, and revelation.

In this newsletter I'll be going over some of the highlights of the week. They include a positive revenue forecast and a strong jobs report, a wonderful, inspiring hearing on tuition equity, final passage of one of my bills, and productive hearings on a couple more.

Before I do so, though, I do want to mention a very special dinner I attended on Friday. It was my own retirement dinner. I was one of forty Portland Community College employees who are retiring this year. (As I've mentioned in earlier newsletters, after thirty years at PCC I'm leaving my full-time position and will be moving to part-time status there.) As you can imagine, it was very much a bittersweet evening, full of powerful, positive memories tinged with sadness. Making it even more special was the fact that Kiki could be there with me—another milestone in her steady recovery.

Revenue Forecast, Employment Report Show Growth

Last Thursday's forecast from state economist Tom Potiowsky showed a significant uptick in expected revenue for the 2011-13 biennium. It's a sign of the continued slow but steady improvement in Oregon's economy, and gives us the opportunity to invest additional resources into vital human services programs for the coming two years.

The forecast shows a projected increase of \$128 million for 11-13, which will help us mitigate the worst of the cuts to programs serving seniors and people with disabilities. It also shows that we're in a position to consider some strategic withdrawals from our state reserves to improve K-12 school funding above the \$5.7 billion level that the legislature approved last month.

If you haven't seen it already, you can [read the entire revenue report here](#). It provides an excellent snapshot of where both the state and federal economy are right now. Potiowsky points out that we've been steadily adding jobs, and we just posted the best year-over-year job growth in the state since 2007; in fact, Oregon had the seventh-highest rate of job creation of all states in the first quarter of 2011. Both imports and exports are very strong, and new business is coming to Oregon, particularly in the clean energy sector.

Tuesday's Employment Report echoed the positive tones of the revenue forecast. Oregon added 1600 jobs above what would be seasonally expected. Especially heartening were 2700 new construction jobs and 700 new jobs in the manufacturing sector (a loss of 500 manufacturing jobs was expected). You can [read the employment report here](#).

There are still some uncertainties out there, particularly with respect to the effects of the earthquake/tsunami in Japan and also the rise in the price of oil. But it now appears unlikely that the economy will fall back into recession. We have a long way to go in our full recovery from the recession, but Oregon appears to be headed in the right direction at last.

Tuition Equity Heard in Rules Committee

Hundreds of supporters of tuition equity came to Salem last Wednesday for our hearing before the Rules Committee. This was the best hearing ever on this subject. It was a great, great day.

The hearing began with the presentation of the bill by three of the four chief sponsors: Sen. Frank Morse (R-Corvallis), Rep. Bob Jenson (R-Pendleton), and me. Senator Morse was just as compelling as he was during testimony in the Senate. I found Rep. Jenson's testimony to be particularly moving. Though he's a Republican from Eastern Oregon and I'm a Democrat from Northeast Portland, Bob and I have something fundamental in common: we're both long-time community college teachers. (He taught for years at Blue Mountain Community College in Pendleton.) We both know the kinds of students who will benefit from tuition equity first-hand; we both know how hard they've worked and how much richer we will be if we allow them to be educated all the way to their potential. In my own testimony, I followed up on his comments with further argument in support of the bill; you can [watch a video of my testimony here](#).

We were followed by panel after panel of powerful supporting testimony (interspersed with panels speaking in opposition, organized by the anti-immigration organization Oregonians for Immigration Reform). We heard from Susan Castillo, Oregon's Superintendent of Public Instruction. She was followed by Jim Francesconi from the State Board of Higher Education, from PSU's Provost, Roy Koch, and from PCC President Preston Pulliams, who represented all of Oregon's community college presidents. We heard from representatives from Oregon's foremost business associations and from small businesses. We heard from teachers and students and principals. You should definitely check out the testimony (video links) from students [Eliseo](#) and [Hugo](#).

I'm particularly proud that we were able to bring Mariana Zamboni, a young woman from California, to the hearing. Mariana is truly a poster child for tuition equity. A native of Guatemala, she was brought to California at a young age and excelled in school and community service. She was able to attend UCLA because California has tuition equity. Just before her graduation from UCLA, her family's application for residency finally came through (after 16 years in the queue!), and within days she was able to accept entry into Harvard's Graduate School of Education. She is now back in California, giving back to the state and her community. [Watch her testimony here](#).

We also heard from Philip Smith, one of the state's and the nation's top immigration lawyers working with undocumented clients. He testified to the committee that most of the young people benefiting from tuition equity would be able to follow their studies with lawful employment. His written testimony pointed to the various paths that immigrants can use to become lawful, pathways that are used by hundreds of Oregonians every year.

The hearing went for more than two hours, and I'm happy to report that a tenor of civil politeness was maintained throughout. (Thanks, Rep. Hunt, for presiding so effectively.) In the end, though, the committee remained deadlocked along partisan lines, as the Republicans on the Rules Committee have so far refused to allow it to come up for a vote. We are still working hard on ways to get it to the floor, and I'm hoping to be able to announce some good news on this front in the next newsletter.

For now, I want to extend my appreciation to everyone who made the hearing such a success: our friends in the Oregon University System, the State Board of Higher Education, the Oregon Student Association, STAND for Children, CAUSA, the BUS Project, the Center for Intercultural Organizing, SEIU, and the office of Representative Chris Harker. And most of all to my staffers, and Michelle Rogelstad in particular. Thank you all so much!

Transfer Student Bill of Rights Goes to Governor

I'm happy to report that HB 3521, legislation I sponsored to create a Transfer Student Bill of Rights and Responsibilities, has passed the Senate 30-0 and will now go to Governor Kitzhaber for his signature. The bill will make it easier for students to transfer credits between community colleges and universities, and ensure that students don't have to needlessly repeat coursework on the way to a degree. It's an important piece of higher education reform, as we look to make transitions within the system seamless and reduce costs and paperwork for students and institutions.

Foster Youth Bill, CTE Legislation Get Hearings

HB 3471 and HB 3662 continue to progress along the path to passage. Both bills had very positive hearings in the Education Committee last month and then went to the Education Subcommittee of Ways and Means (the budget-writing committee). They were among the first of the policy bills to be heard by the subcommittee, which is important for their future success.

We heard strong testimony from the Oregon University System Oregon Community Colleges Association in support of the former foster youth bill. They have given us assurances that they can manage the new program within their existing budgets, and they are eager to give foster youth the confidence that if they stay engaged and work hard, they will be able to afford to go to college and university. This is particularly important for these students, since fewer than 2% of former foster youth in Oregon obtain bachelor's degrees. This must change.

We also have strong support for the CTE bill from legislators and representatives of labor and industry. The bill will fund career and technical education partnership pilot projects in ten communities around the state. The tricky part, as you can imagine, is finding the dollars for the initial investment. That's what we're working on now.

These bills most likely won't be cleared for a vote until after the remaining big budget bills are voted on (particularly those funding the Oregon University System, Community Colleges, and Oregon Opportunity Grants). As you can imagine, we're working hard to make sure that they get to a vote.

Until next week,

Michael