



Whitsett at the Capitol

Senator Doug Whitsett – District 28

March 2, 2007 74th Session, Issue 6

Dear Friends,

Business is really starting to pick up here at the capitol. Monday was the last day for members to introduce measure proposals for this legislative session. From here on out, each member is only allowed to introduce two priority bills to go through the lawmaking process. This deadline is part of the retiming provisions that Senate Concurrent Resolution 1 stipulates in an effort to get the Legislature to adjourn in a timely manner this session. We have introduced several bills for consideration this session, some of which have been addressed in previous sessions. Starting Monday, March 5, both the Senate and the House will begin holding daily floor sessions. As a result we should be passing more measures out of the Senate and into the House for consideration. The next deadline specified by SJR 1 facing the legislature is April 30, which is the last day for Senate committees to work Senate bills and House committees to work House bills.

Ways and Means Committee

In today's Ways and Means Committee meeting we voted in SJR 3 and SB 49. The first is a referral to the voters in a May election of a constitutional amendment that will repeal the "corporate kicker" and redirected those funds to a newly created "rainy day fund." The second is a statute that would create the mechanism for the transfer of the kicker funds to the new "rainy day fund."

I strongly oppose both of these measures. To ask the people of Oregon whether the corporate kicker should continue into the future is a legitimate request. But the purpose of SJR 3 is to ask the people of Oregon to authorize the Legislative Assembly to impose a retroactive quarter of a billion dollar tax increase on corporations doing business in Oregon. Notwithstanding projected revenue that exceeds our essential budget level (EBL) by more than half a billion dollars, we plan to repeal a tax credit that is mostly already earned and that is already included in future business plans. We are asking the people of Oregon to authorize this Assembly to break a promise to Oregon businesses. What kind of a message does this proposal send to our Oregon business community?

I come from a rural culture where a deal is a deal, and where if your word is suspect you lose all respect and credibility. If we believe that the corporate kicker is not a good deal, and I'm not convinced that it is, then we should act to ensure that we do not continue the poor deal into the future. But to retroactively change the deal to impose a quarter of a billion dollar tax increase on Oregon's business community is wrong and I will not support it.

School District Insurance Pools

I've been receiving a large amount of phone calls and e-mails from you regarding SB 426. This is the bill that creates a common insurance pool for school districts along with an Oregon Educators Benefit Board. It would require the board to contract for health and dental benefit plans that are comparable in design and not more expensive than benefit plans provided by districts immediately prior to the purchase of board-approved plans. The board would be permitted to contract for supplemental health and dental benefit plans, supplemental vision, disability insurance, life insurance, accidental death and flexible benefit plans. Most of the correspondence I've received has been in opposition to this bill and you can rest assured that I join you in opposition to this piece of legislation. I voted no on the passage of this bill out of committee for several reasons.

As a member of the Joint Ways and Means Committee, I was provided with numerous spread sheets of statistics that clearly demonstrate that SB 426 will result in increased costs to the districts and the taxpayer. What I have not been provided with are statistics that demonstrate that this legislation would create any savings over current contracts. It is clear that we simply do not have the financial data needed to make this decision. Essentially, the Oregon State Legislature is attempting to make a business decision on behalf of the taxpayers when there is no consensus on the financial benefits or costs of this bill. Moreover, the structure of the board that this bill creates has no provisions for participation by management or by the taxpayers. I do not make business decisions for myself until the finances pencil out, and I don't believe that your state government should be making business decisions for the taxpayers until we have all the facts and figures penciled out.

On the Agenda – Our Legislation

SB 795 – This bill is the reintroduced “Fair Energy Bill” that Senator Bill Morissette (D-Springfield) and I introduced in the 2005 session. This same bill passed through the Senate as SB 527 with a unanimous “yes” vote and was never released from the House of Representatives to the floor for a vote. No explanation was ever given for this. This is good policy that rural citizens deserve, and we are hopeful that this bill will make progress this session and bring much needed restoration of local input into the energy siting process.

SB 798 – This bill creates dedicated funding for the Oregon State Police without raising taxes or fees on Oregon families and small businesses. This bill sets aside 1% of General Fund revenue for the sole purpose of funding the Oregon State Police Patrol Division. In the last 25 years, Oregon's population has increased by 38%, while the State Police Patrol Division has been reduced by over 50%.

SB 800 – This bill requires school district and education service districts to make annual financial reports to the public. We believe that Oregon school districts and education service districts should be required to be more transparent in reporting income and expenditures of the district. To that end, the purpose of this bill is to provide a method for an individual or group of individuals who reside in a district to require the district to account for how their public tax dollars are spent.

SB 993 – This is the JOBS Plus reauthorization bill that has been revised since last session. Jobs Plus is a very successful program that diverts money from the unemployment insurance trust fund to help employers pay a small portion of the wages for newly created jobs for the first 13 weeks. It is a very worthwhile program that creates jobs, but also enhances the skills of our workforce and contributes to the economic development of our state. Every year, 4000 Oregonians who would otherwise not find work would be able to do so with the assistance of this program. This proposed bill focuses on the 4000 unemployed claimants who are most in need and are expected to exhaust their unemployment benefits without finding work. Although last session this bill had strong support from all 12 Republican Senators, 29 Republican Representatives and numerous satisfied employers and employees, the bill never reached the House floor for a vote. I hope to get this legislation safely enacted this session with the help and support of my colleagues.

As always, the purpose of our office is to first and foremost serve as a resource to you, my constituents. My staff and I are here to assist you in your public policy questions and receive your valuable ideas and input. We'll always maintain an open door and open ear as we strive to ensure that the voice of rural Oregon is heard here in Salem. Please use this contact information to connect with our office.

Please Contact or Visit us in Salem

Senator Doug Whitsett

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