



Whitsett at the Capitol

Senator Doug Whitsett – District 28

February 21, 2007 74th Session, Issue 2

Dear Friends,

Early in the past century the federal government withdrew large tracts of land from private ownership when it established forest and rangeland reserves. At that time, the federal government promised to make up for the loss of property tax revenues to the counties by paying a timber harvest tax to the counties. Due to the spotted owl debacle and other specious environmental concerns, timber harvest on federal land has been reduced by more than 90% over the past 20 years. In order to keep their promise to pay for that lost property and timber harvest tax revenue, the federal government created the Secure Rural Schools and Communities Self Determination Act. The current Congress is acting to break that promise. To date, our congressional delegation of seven has had no success in convincing their colleagues that a promise made is a debt unpaid.

The direct result is that as many as seventeen Oregon counties are facing revenue reductions of from 1/3 to 1/2 of their entire budget. Several Oregon counties are facing bankruptcy. In fact, the total loss of revenue to the 36 Oregon counties will exceed \$450 million over the next two years.

Governor Ted Kulongoski has asked some of his agency directors to see what they can do to help. Other than that, our governor has made it clear that, as far as he is concerned, the counties are “on their own”. He has said that the state has no obligation to help the counties. He has said that there will be no state “bailout” as a result of the federal government’s apparent breach of contract with Oregon’s counties. The governor said that Oregon’s rural counties knew that this day might come and that they should have been prepared. He said that the \$450 million loss in revenue is simply too expensive for the state to deal with.

Perhaps our Governor should be reminded that our state’s revenue projections are sufficient to maintain current service levels as well as to provide more than \$600 million in new and enhanced services. Perhaps he should be reminded that all Oregon citizens and all Oregon taxpayers reside in counties. Perhaps he should be reminded that Oregon’s counties are political subdivisions of the state. Perhaps he should be reminded that most of our government’s service to people is provided at the local level by counties. Perhaps the governor should remember that Oregon’s Department of Human Services employs twice the national average number of employees per capita than all other states in the union.

The same week the Governor made his statements regarding the rural counties of Oregon being on their own, the governor asked for a 38% general fund increase over the next two years for his own office, so he can hire more staff, have a greater travel budget (an increase of \$160,000), and remodel his office and buy new furniture (\$250,000). This does not include an

additional \$431,000 for new computer equipment. He is seeking a total of three million dollars increase, from nearly \$11 million to \$14 million for his personal governor's office.

Of the additional three million, nearly \$500,000 would be to employ a lobbyist formerly of Senator Ron Wyden's office, to set up an office in Washington DC.

In my opinion, Ted Kulongoski's apparent willingness to ignore the plight of Oregon's rural people is unconscionable. Senate Republican leadership is working on legislation to help address the present crisis. We also urge you to contact other legislators, as well as the Governor, to let them know your concerns for the rural Oregon counties who will soon be under siege.

The Making of a Bill

Our staff and I thought you would be interested in the process that entails the making of a bill in the legislature.

First a Senator or Representative brings forth a concept, by writing down his/her intentions. This statement or statements are then submitted to Legislative Counsel (a group of lawyers hired by the state to make sure your potential bill comports with other laws already in statute). The newly created legally crafted and worded article becomes a "legislative concept" and is assigned an "LC" number.

Once the Legislative Concept is numbered and released to the originator, this individual requests co-sponsors from their Senate and House colleagues. We at the legislature are still awaiting a vast number of our legislative concepts to be drafted and released at this, the sixth week of session.

This coming Monday, February 27, is the final day the legislators have to submit to the Secretary of the Senate or Chief Clerk of the House, our legislative concepts with the co-sponsors' signatures and receive an official bill number. If the cost of the bill to the state of Oregon is over \$50,000, then the bill is referred to the Ways and Means Committee.

If it has little monetary ramification, the bill is referred to a committee and then a hearing, or hearings, will be undertaken. The bill will either pass or fail in committee and it then goes to the floor of the chamber it originated in for a full vote from its members. If it is voted out of the first chamber, it then moves to the other chamber where it receives a first reading and is assigned to a committee.

From here the bill undergoes an almost identical process through committee – hearings will be undertaken and a work session ensues. If the bill passes out of committee, it goes to the floor of that chamber for yet another vote. If it passes both chambers, it is sent to the Governor, where he will either sign it into law, or veto it and it dies. Over 4000 bills were presented to Oregon Legislators in the 2005 legislative session. Thankfully few actually made it into law.

Press Release from the House Republicans

"House Republicans introduced a constitutional amendment requiring the Legislature to pass K-12 funding by the 81st day of session. House Joint Resolution 21 was introduced because House

Democrats have delayed public consideration of the State School Fund as Oregon school districts await legislative action.

“We are at the 45th day of the regular session and the Ways and Means Education Subcommittee has yet to consider school funding for the 2007-2009 biennium,” said House Republican Leader Wayne Scott.

“Passing an education budget within 81 days gives school districts the opportunity to determine their funding before the fiscal year begins,” said Rep. Dennis Richardson, the chief sponsor of the House Republican resolution. “HJR 21 eliminates the politics of delay.”

“Education funding is typically one of the last budgets to pass the Legislature. Despite past efforts by House Republicans to fund schools first, education budgets in both the 2003 and 2005 sessions were passed in August. HJR 21 suspends legislative compensation if the education budget is not funded within 81 days.”

Please Contact or Visit us in Salem

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