

Op/Ed by Jean Cowan
March 10, 2010

It's good to be home after a successful 25-day special Legislative Session and I am pleased with what we were able to accomplish. We were able to move forward with only a few refinements of the 2009-11 biennial budget in order to protect our most critical services in the education, public safety, and human services budgets. That included fulfilling our promise to fund education at the planned \$6 billion level, aided by the reform of the Business Energy Tax Credit (BETC), which will save approximately \$50 million.

I am particularly satisfied with the passage of my priority bill this session, HB 3643. It allows Oregon State University to utilize \$9 million in existing capital construction funds as matching funds, significantly improving their chances to compete successfully for a \$16 million grant from the National Institute of Standards and Technology. That \$25 million project will build a Marine Mammal Institute (MMI) at the Hatfield Marine Science Center (HMSC) in Newport. This new facility will make possible hiring up to 100 new faculty/staff, adding an estimated \$9-15 million/year to Oregon's economy.

As we watch the results of our successful bid to bring the NOAA homeport project to Newport, along with the investments made in a new aquarium science building at Oregon Coast Community College, I predict that Newport will soon be nationally recognized as a major center for marine science and education.

I'm proud to work with the bipartisan, bicameral Coastal Caucus, whose members are legislators representing the entire Oregon Coast, to effectively represent our interests. We were also heartened by the passage of both Rep. Boone's effort (HB 3633) to further the development of alternative energy projects, including tidal energy, and HB 3613 which bans offshore oil drilling along our beautiful coastline. The Coastal Caucus continues to be closely involved in the establishment of a limited system of Marine Reserves and the work of the Community Teams as we seek to find a balance between needed marine research, protection of our valuable resources, and stability for our sustainable fisheries.

My recent appointment to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means focused much of my work this session on the budgetary issues. It was a new and rewarding experience for me. I was also able to continue in my position as Chair of the House Veterans and Emergency Services Committee, where we continued the work begun in 2009 to find better ways to connect deserving veterans with available services, including education opportunities, healthcare, and mental health support.

This was our second trial of holding annual sessions. The work accomplished during these shorter special sessions reinforced the need to formally adopt a system of annual sessions, creating the opportunity in the even-numbered years to meet briefly to address our most pressing needs. Oregon voters will have the opportunity to vote in November on whether the Legislature should meet for 35 days in even-numbered years in addition to a 160-day regular session in odd-numbered years.

This session was focused on job creation and stability, along with helping Oregon's struggling families during these difficult economic times. It included the passage of new funds that will help small businesses create new jobs and hire Oregonians, the continuation of the Employment Related Day Care program, and the extension of unemployment benefits for nearly 19,000 Oregonians whose benefits have run out or will soon expire.

During the interim, I will continue work on key issues related to services for seniors and people with disabilities, our state budget, veteran affairs, and emergency services. It's an honor to serve you as your State Representative.

State Rep. Jean Cowan has served House District 10 on the Central Oregon Coast since 2007. She can be contacted by email at rep.jeancowan@state.or.us or phone at 541-867-4233.