

House Democratic Office

PRESS RELEASE

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Republicans pass budget that cuts teachers, shortens school year
House Democrats fight for no-cuts budget, but Republican majority passes HB 5092

SALEM—The Democrats of the Oregon House of Representatives were unable to hold off the Republican majority Friday, and the House passed a Republican budget for schools that will cut teachers, shorten Oregon's school year, and end valuable academic programs. The nearly party-line vote was 32-27. One Republican voted with the Democrats against the bill.

Rep. Arnie Roblan (D-Coos Bay) charged that the Republican budget falls \$180 million short of a "survival budget" for schools.

"If the Legislature passes this budget, schools will suffer more cuts—have no doubt about that," Roblan said. "We must ask ourselves whether Oregon can continue as a forward-looking society with a vibrant economy if we let our schools crumble down around the shoulders of our children; if we let a third of our high school students drop out; if we continue to let our class sizes balloon, sacrificing the benefits of individual attention from teachers."

Roblan warned that if the House passed the Republican cuts, the legislature will have "surrendered to those cynics who disdain the democratic values that have made this country great—chiefly, the belief that every generation bears an obligation to educate its young, and to prepare them for the challenges they will face as they enter adulthood."

Earlier in the month, the House Democrats tried to bring a "no-cuts" schools budget to the floor of the House, but the Republican majority used a rare parliamentary trick to delay a vote on the measure until Aug. 31—a date on which nobody expects the legislature still to be in session. The Democratic bill would have funded public schools at \$5.4 billion, which nearly all advocates for schools is essential to prevent more serious cuts.

Rep. Greg Macpherson (D-Lake Oswego) said money is not the issue. "What we have here is not a failure of resources, but a failure of political will," Macpherson said. "Approving this budget is telling Oregon's children we won't do right by them, not because we are unable, but because we choose not to."

Macpherson said the state has enough money to pay for a no-cuts budget for schools and still fund essential human services. "For the past four and a half months, we've heard excuses," Macpherson said. "Some claim there's not enough revenue. They claim there are other more pressing needs. They set up false choices between education and programs to help seniors, disabled people, and other vulnerable Oregonians."

But the excuses don't stand up to scrutiny, Macpherson said. He pointed to the May revenue forecast, which projects \$400 million more in revenue than the legislature anticipated when it convened in January. "We have enough resources to provide other essential services and still provide \$5.4 billion for K-12 schools," Macpherson said. "This amount is necessary to start pulling our schools out of the downward spiral of recent years."

Rep. Brad Witt (D-Clatskanie) described how schools in his legislative district have suffered from more than a decade's worth of budget cuts. Astoria's schools have lost 14.5 teaching positions, he said, while Clatskanie's budget for schools is at the same dollar level as 20 years ago. The Rainier district has actually closed three schools in the past five years, Witt said.

Witt also decried deep cuts in academic programs, thanks to ever smaller budgets—cuts to mathematics programs, art, athletics, shop, and languages. "If you want our youth to get good jobs, we must give them the skills they need," Witt said.

Roblan also questioned the Republican-led House's priorities with respect to schools and tax giveaways.

"So far this session, the House has approved new tax breaks that total more than \$800 million, most of which impact taxpayers in the future," Roblan said. "The reduction in the capital gains tax alone, if approved by the Senate, would cost Oregon well over half a billion dollars over the next three budget cycles. How can anyone in this chamber justify handing out tax giveaways of this magnitude when our schools so desperately need new investment? How can anyone justify putting the profits of big, out-of-state companies ahead of our children's education?"

Roblan urged his House colleagues to change the state's policy on funding schools. "The time has come to sow excellence," Roblan said. "The time has come to show our constituents that we will put schools first, just as we promised in our campaign mailings. The time has come to upgrade Oregon's investment in public education and notify the world that Oregon is the place where you can count on a workforce that's prepared for the jobs of this brave new world."