



# Legislative Report

## Representative Brad Witt



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*Hi Everyone,*

The big news this week is the release of the Ways and Means Co-Chairs budget. Governor Kitzhaber released his budget back in January, and this is the Legislature's response to his suggested allocation of funds. Chief among the differences is the Legislature's proposed funding for education over the next two years. It is by far the largest expenditure in state government as K-12 accounts for 38% of the general funds budget, which is made up of income tax and lottery revenues.

The Co-Chairs budget allocated \$5.7 billion for K-12 funding, providing roughly the same amount of funds in 2011-12 as the current school year and slightly more than the Governor's budget. An additional \$55 million could be added for 2012-13 funding if the economy shows continued improvement. **\$5.7 million means school funding is flat or slightly reduced for the next biennium** and, according to reports from school districts across the state, it isn't enough to avoid layoffs and loss of school days for many of Oregon's schools.

Although the process has been relatively friendly in the face of a divided House, there are many remaining issues to be resolved. The Legislature is particularly concerned about the Governor's recommended budget for Seniors and People with Disabilities. The Subcommittee on Human Services will continue to focus on resolving issues within this budget. There will also be more discussion about how much money should be left in reserve, and how much of the Education Stability Fund and/or the Rainy Day Fund should be tapped in the second half of the biennium, should the need arise.

This budget is intended to allow the Governor and his agency leaders, as well as the Legislature in the 2012 Session, time to address the issue of changing how the state delivers services. Maintaining critical services will require common sacrifice, not the least of which will involve:

- A freeze or reduction in compensation for the Governor and all statewide elected officials, including the Legislature and agency management
- Concessions from state workers on salary, health care and pension costs
- Furloughs and reductions in force, subject to collective bargaining agreements
- Reductions in services and supplies

**Finally, this budget proposal is based on the current strengths and weaknesses of Oregon's economic recovery.** The state economist is predicting recovery, and the recent job gains are great news. But the same forecast cites the clear dangers that our recovery faces: an increase in the price of oil, unrest in the Middle East and the disaster in Japan. We are making a sincere effort to address all possible scenarios. It is going to take all of us working together to build the future we need for our state.

### *Bills of Interest...*

- **SB 846** Directs Dept. of Transportation to adopt standards for bicycle trailers designed for human passengers.
- **SB 695** Creates unlawful practice of manufacturing, distributing, or offering for sale child's beverage container, container for infant formula or reusable bottle lined with Bisphenol A or replacement material that is carcinogenic or is reproductive toxicant.
- **SB 945** Prohibits manufacturers or other specified persons from knowingly selling brake friction material or motor vehicles or trailers with brake friction material containing specific amounts of certain fibers or elements that are hazardous when released into state waterways.
- **SB 538** Requires Dept. of Human Services to adopt rules requiring drug testing of adult applicants for and recipients of public assistance.
- **HB 2020** Directs state agencies to report to Ways & Means ratio of agency employees to supervisory employees/managerial positions/number of manager who do not supervise.
- **HB 2229** Establishes Oregon Homeless Veterans Coalition in Dept. of Veterans Affairs.

### *Items of Interest...*

On Tuesday, I was honored to be present as Governor Kitzhaber announced the granting of \$11.2 million to the Vernonia School District from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) for the dismantling of their flood ravaged school buildings and the creation of a city park. This event recognizes the remarkable collaboration of the community of Vernonia, federal elected and emergency management officials and the Oregon Solutions Team. The new city park will protect environmentally sensitive wetlands, as well as provide a venue for environmental education and school athletic performances. Congratulations to the people of Vernonia for their dedication to their community and their children. Way to go, Vernonia!

Thanks again for reading my newsletter. Let's hope we at least have some sunshine this weekend!



## *Pictures...*

At the Legislature:



Governor Kitzhaber signing the "Welcome Home Viet Nam Veterans Day" (March 30, annually) Bill that originated in my Veterans' Affairs Committee.

In Vernonia:



Celebrating Vernonia's receipt of an \$11 million school relocation grant.



Congratulating Vernonia High School senior, Kristina Halverson on her big day: a speech at the FEMA Day, completion of the post-flood remodel of her family's home and a visit to the construction site (photo) of the new Vernonia School.

In District Day:



Talking with Erica Angus of Bellisima Salon & Boutique about the problems small business face in Astoria



Discussing business with Jan and Michael Lindstrom at the Danish Made Bakery in Astoria



Radio interview with KMUN, Astoria



Learning first hand about the Seaman Program from Tongue Point Job Corp students.



Addressing the Tongue Point (Astoria) luncheon reception about the importance of Job Corps training and workforce development.



Talking with local historian R. J. "Bob" Brown at South Columbia County Chamber of Commerce office



Interview with The Chronicle Publisher Don Patterson in St. Helens.



Checking in with Columbia County Action Team (Ken Johnson, Rocky Johnson and Joe Pyle) about their top ranked veterans' services.



Discussing the various services offered by the Columbia County Women's Resource Center with Director Rachael Berry-Dame.