

Governor defends education budget

By Jonathan J. Cooper
Associated Press

PORTLAND (AP) — Gov. John Kitzhaber on Tuesday, January 5, defended his proposed budget from critics who say it shortchanges education, telling a crowd of business officials that pouring more money into education won't improve graduation rates or student achievement.

A week before he takes the oath of office to kick off his fourth term, the Democratic governor spelled out his vision to use state funding to nudge school districts to make the education changes he seeks.

He's proposed a budget that would direct most new education money toward preschool programs. Ensuring children are ready for kindergarten and reading with their peers by third grade will keep them from falling behind when they reach high school, Kitzhaber has long said.

He also wants to change the school funding formula to reward schools that show success in certain areas, such as getting English language learners up to speed and investing in new career-focused classes.

"The money has to come from somewhere," Kitzhaber said, and pulling it out of some areas to funnel toward education may have a detrimental impact on children.

"The money we're spending on housing, the money we're spending on

mental health, the money we're spending on stabilizing families has a huge impact on the ability of these young kids to succeed," Kitzhaber told the executives, lawmakers and lobbyists gathered at the annual Oregon Business Summit in Portland.

Some school advocates have said the governor's proposed budget wouldn't provide enough money to reduce class sizes or provide training for teachers.

Kitzhaber sported a small bandage on his left cheek. His spokeswoman, Amy Wojcicki, said he had a skin biopsy.

The business summit is a platform for the state's most politically connected business officials to promote their priorities for the legislative session that begins next month. They're pushing for stronger connections between education and careers, a large package of infrastructure projects and investments in natural resources.

In a second speech hours later, Kitzhaber celebrated the new jobs created by an improving economy but lamented that wages have been stagnant for decades.

"This recovery is actually leaving more and more of our fellow Oregonians behind," Kitzhaber said. "Sometimes, I feel a little bit disingenuous talking about economic recovery, because I am sure that term does not have much meaning to hundreds of thousands of people in this state."

He challenged the business leaders to "engage with me in a serious conversation about the inherent contradiction between a rapidly growing economy and the increasingly desperate plight of hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens."

The governor and senior legislative leaders all spoke supportively of approving a statewide transportation project, but they did not discuss specifics. A transportation bill would likely be funded through an increase in a fee or tax — such as the gas tax or vehicle licensing fees — requiring a three-fifths majority from both the House and the Senate. It would need to do have overwhelming bipartisan support — and lobbying from the business community — in order for lawmakers not to worry it will be used as a weapon in a future political campaign, senior lawmakers said.

"We need you to want to make it a reality as much as you want to talk about it," Senate President Peter Courtney, D-Salem, told business leaders.

"It will only happen if you want it bad enough," he added.

Rep. Mike McLane of Powell Butte, the top Republican in the House, said Republicans are open to a transportation package, as long as they have a say in how it's crafted.

"If we're left out, politics gets tough," McLane said.

Sisters salutes...



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• Paso by Paso Equine Rehabilitation and Educational program wishes to thank all the kind and generous folks who made donations to our charity. Sisters Feed & Supply generously hosted our giving tree with a 10 percent discount on all feed and supplies purchased for us. Thank you to Sisters Feed, the greatest little feed store, and all the charitable hearts whose donations help us do a better job in rescue and education.

• Sisters Kiwanis salutes the Sisters community for their generous response to the Kiwanis Food Bank need for funds. The donations received in response to the recent *Nugget* feature article exceeded all expectations.

The donations will fund several months of 2015 food purchases; the money also enabled Kiwanis to distribute Christmas gift cards to 169 families comprising 512

individuals. Those gift cards were used by families to buy their Christmas meals at Melvin's Fir Street Market or Food 4 Less.

• Reg and Mary Henry wrote:

To all those volunteers out there associated with Volunteers in Action, Deschutes Community Justice Department — a great big thank-you from Reggie and Mary for the wonderful ramp that you built in our yard for us.

This is making it so much easier for Reggie to come and go from our house without the threat of a fall down our steps. We really appreciate the efforts of all that were here and behind the scenes to make this happen for us.

And to Dave for the grab bars in the restroom — thank you. These were done above and beyond our expectations and greatly appreciated by us. Thank you all.



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