

Finance frustration dominates legislative air

Editor's note: Mary Beth Bowen is one of two Emerald reporters covering the Oregon Legislature full-time.

By MARY BETH BOWEN
Of the Emerald

SALEM — The mood was a combination of Christmas and pomp and circumstance as Oregon's Legislature opened its 59th session Monday. Black-robed judges marched up the aisle, legislators played to galleries packed with friends and relatives, and afterwards, everyone gathered in the lobby for cake and punch.

But outside on the ice-slick steps of the Capitol, the mood was frustration. Armed with signs reading "This year our kids, next year yours?" about 70 Cottage Grove students, teachers and citizens voiced their dissatisfaction with Oregon's current system of school finance.

The 3,400 students in the South Lane District have been out of school since Thanksgiving. Today, the district will make its fifth try for voter approval of its operating budget. If the budget goes down, schools there will close until June.

"We're here to try and convince the Legislature to act on school finance this session," said Frank Long, a journalism teacher from Cottage Grove High School and organizer of the Salem demonstration. "If they don't, we'll have more closures next year."

A reform plan authored by Senate Pres. Jason Boe, D-Reedsport, already is receiving legislative attention. Boe's plan would update tax bases (the amount of money a district can levy without voter approval) and allow the base to increase six per cent annually, as it does under current law. After two budget defeats, the district would fall back on the prior year's operating levy as its base.

Long said he dislikes the Boe

plan because "ten years from now it will put us in the same situation. A tax base means you're trapped with a flat figure that doesn't reflect enrollment or inflation increases. Suppose Corvallis has an up-to-date tax base, but an electronic firm moves in and adds 300 new kids to the district. All of a sudden you don't have enough money, and if Oregon's population is increasing by 11 per cent a year, a flat tax base is definitely not the way to go."

The high school students who demonstrated Monday said they don't care how the Legislature solves the school finance problem, just as long as they do.

"I'm so bored, I'm going up the wall," said Jan Butler, 16, of Cottage Grove High School. "I miss my friends and there aren't any basketball games. And after missing seven weeks, I'm not going to remember the Algebra I learned during the first nine weeks school was open."

Some "no" voters in the South Lane District have accused the schools of excessive educational "frills," but the students claimed Monday that the frills often keep students in school.

"Macrame is a frill to some people," said Robin Patterson, 17, also of Cottage Grove High. "But if they just had reading, writing, and arithmetic, a lot of kids wouldn't go."

The steps of the Capitol were not the only scene for protest Monday. Down the block, 21 members of the Revolutionary Student Brigade (RSB) were pic-

ketting the Court of Appeals building, calling for bail for Tom Bornson. Bornson, migrant worker, took over a Portland food-stamp office Feb. 6, 1976, after failing to find work or obtain foodstamps for his family.

"When working people can't even feed their families, can't get work and have to sell their blood for money, something is very, very wrong," said John Lanier, of the Eugene RSB. "We are demonstrating to build a campaign against unemployment, against cuts in social services, against all the conditions which made Bornson do what he did."

Bornson was convicted on counts of kidnapping and robbery by the Multnomah County Circuit Court, and appealed his conviction to the State Court of Appeals. On Dec. 14, the state court denied

a motion to release Bornson on bail while his appeal is pending. The RSB claims that the courts usually grant bail when a conviction is on appeal.

David Gernant, legal counsel for the Court of Appeals, says this is not the case.

"Oregon statutes provide that release (of a convicted criminal) pending appeal is up to the discretion of the trial court," said Gernant. He added that it is unusual for a court to grant bail to a convicted person.

However, the Bornson demonstration may have been in vain. According to public documents on file at the Court of Appeals office, Bornson's attorney Robert Cannon has filed a motion to dismiss the appeal of Bornson's conviction. Cannon declined to say why.

Vote decides budget fate

Voters in the Cottage Grove area will be going to the polls today to decide the fate of a proposed budget for the South Lane School District.

The South Lane School District has been closed for about seven weeks after voters turned down a budget request in November. The district is receiving attention because it is the only district in the nation to shut its doors due to lack of funds.

The controversy centers around the spiraling cost of keeping the schools open and the voters' unwillingness to vote for an increase in property taxes.

At present, schools are allowed to increase budgets by 6 per cent without voter approval. But if more than a 6 per cent increase in the previous years' tax base is desired, voters must approve the budget.

Today's election is the fifth budget request for funds for the district. Four previous requests were voted down.

But the issue is not confined to South Lane. Legislative observers predict the question of school finance will be an important issue facing the State Legislature this session, although just how to solve the problem will not be an easy matter.

Anti-vandal leader hit

KLAMATH FALLS (AP) — Last Tuesday, an anonymous phone caller told Gilbert C. "Gib" Pitney's wife, Estelle, "Tell Gib I just shot a hole through his place again and the next one is going through his head."

It was the latest in a series of harassments and threats against Pitney, the founder of an organization aimed at stopping poaching and vandalism in this southern Oregon county. "It makes me work all the harder," Pitney said. "These assaults against me are not just personal but they are attacks against decency and society as a whole."

About a year ago, bullets ripped through a kitchen window in Pitney's drive-in restaurant.

Last July, a boulder and the decapitated head of a doe were thrown through a window in the same restaurant. The deer's legs and hide were found near the back door.

Then, last Tuesday, another gun shot pierced a window of the restaurant, spraying lead and glass particles throughout the building's interior. A short time later, the anonymous caller phoned Pitney's home.

In 1971, Pitney founded a nonprofit organization called Stop Poaching and Vandalism (SPAV), an organization of landowners and sportsmen which, Pitney says, has about 10,000 members in Klamath County, where the population is about 56,000.

The members report information on incidents of poaching and vandalism without revealing the names of the informers.

He figures the harassment is directly connected with his work in the organization, but he said the threats have failed to discourage him.

"With thousands of people working for SPAV here in Klamath County, we see the possibility of several hundred thousand people in a statewide program," Pitney said.

"Hopefully, we expect to have 10 or 12 Oregon counties by Feb. 1," he said. "I would like to see it become a nationwide movement."

Pitney says studies show that vandalism in Klamath County decreased by 89.5 per cent from 1972 to 1974, while vandalism increased nationally by 18 per cent during the same period.

ALCOHOLISM:

• A Common Encounter •

E.S.C.A.P.E. announces sponsorship of a special study group Fall Term.

We welcome U of O students, staff and faculty who have lived with alcoholism in their homes to join a (confidential) discussion group this winter.

Our purpose is to understand the effects alcoholism has on family members and the impact of this experience in adult life.

Our long-range goal is to develop a training program for volunteers to work with children in the Eugene-Springfield community who presently confront alcoholism. If you grew up with alcoholism or presently live with this problem, please join us.

Our first organizational meeting will be held on Wednesday, Jan. 12th at 3:00 p.m. The room will be posted in the EMU.

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