Legislators introduce bill to give kicker fund to schools, taxpayers

By Nick Reed
Of the Emerald

The mad scramble for a $136 million kicker fund began Tuesday with the proposal of a bill that would split the money between basic school support and individual property tax relief.

The money is from a 1979 law that provides a 2 percent kicker fund compiled from overestimated state personal or corporate income tax collections.

In order for the monies to be allocated, the 1979 law would have to be repealed.

That is what Rep. Mike Kopetski, D-Salem, and Sen. Frank Roberts, D-Portland, hope to accomplish with their proposal, HB 3350.

Legislative issues

Under current law, there is no provision for the 2 percent fund to be divvied up. The entire amount would be distributed to individual taxpayers statewide in the form of tax-relief credits.

But since the governor's budget actually would give already-starving school districts less support next year than this year, the need to provide additional support is acute, the legislators said.

"What we're faced with right now," Roberts said of the budget, "are tremendous gaps to fill in order to maintain the programs we approved last session."

Roberts said that to preserve the existing programs, drastic cuts would have to be made just to deal with the problems of funding.

"This proposal will help in a modest way," he said, adding that revenue from the funds would help in "filling the gaps."

Calling the money a "drop in the bucket," Roberts said the money would serve a two-fold purpose.

First, it would go to the individual taxpayer to give a portion of basic relief. And second, it would increase the basic school support from 29 percent to 31 percent.

"We're focusing on the school support," Roberts said, "in the hopes that it will give them some needed money and reduce their dependency on property tax revenues."

Kopetski, a longtime backer of school support, said the money also would breathe life into comatose school districts.

"This measure will help keep schools open," Kopetski said, adding that the Legislature then could provide income tax relief to Oregonians through federal and state income tax reforms.

The legislators said there were "crying needs" in the state for funding that are not being met. The results are inflated property tax burdens on individual citizens and the closure of schools.

Goldschmidt's 1987-89 biennial budget calls for a 5 percent increase in basic school support. But since the inflation rate is expected to reach nearly 9 percent during this period, about one half of Oregon's 305 school districts actually will lose money.

The $136 million surplus kicker represents taxes already collected by the state that must be refunded to individual taxpayers based on income.

The backers of the bill repealing the current law state that this money should be available to meet the legislative needs of the state, particularly in the area of providing quality education to Oregon's schoolchildren.

"The state has a responsibility in funding schools," Kopetski said.

And since the additional money would exceed the expenditure limit of the state to school districts, both Kopetski and Roberts would exempt school support from this limit.

The bill introduced by the legislators also recommends that any remaining undistributed funds should be credited to the general fund for discretionary government expenses.

Other proposed uses of the fund include direct payments to individual taxpayers and support for AIDS research.

FEMA

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"This covers things like a chemical spill on I-5 or an earthquake. FEMA says they'll cut funding for all types of disasters if we don't participate," she said.

There are no laws that state FEMA must cut all funding, Keller said.

"Our Legislature is working to insure FEMA doesn't cut it," she said.

"The threat to withdraw federal emergency planning funds from those who don't take part in the FEMA drill is unfortunate. But it is consistent with the federal government's continued insistence on taking the world to the nuclear brink," said Hans Tschersich, president of Physicians for Social Responsibility in Eugene.

David Zupan, a member of Citizen Action for Lasting Security, said he was pleased with the governor's decision, but he was not all together surprised. He said most of the 10 counties that were to participate already had decided not to, so it was not difficult for the governor to make a decision.

"It is a credit to the citizens of the state because they responded and contacted commissioners and the governor, and they saw through the absurdity of the plan," Zupan said. He pointed out that the tremendous citizen response shows that citizens can have an effect on a local and a national level.

Zupan said that economically it would be a waste of taxpayers' money to plan for nuclear war.

"It perpetuates the myth that nuclear war would be OK and that people could survive," he explained.

Johnson said the extent of nuclear war and what would happen economically can't be determined. He sees the local and state governments playing a larger role than the federal government if there were a nuclear attack.

"In the cities that survive there would be local hospitals and police, but they'd only survive for a number of days. The federal government could help make them last for months, not days," he said.