

# New tax base measure approved

By Don Peters  
Emerald Associate Editor

SALEM — The House of Representatives on Friday put the finishing touches on a school finance reform measure that, if passed by voters, would establish new tax bases for more than 100 Oregon school districts.

In a 35-21 vote, legislators approved House Joint Resolu-

## Legislative Update

tion 1, which will now appear on the May 16 statewide primary election.

The vote coincided with a report released by the state Department of Education. According to the report, 48 school districts remain in the "safety net," a law approved by voters in May 1987 that allows school with insufficient tax bases to

remain open by operating under the previous year's property tax levies.

The safety net was originally created as a stop-gap measure to keep schools open until a more permanent solution to the school finance problem could be found.

Legislators are hoping HJR1 will help solve the problem. According to current Oregon law, two-thirds of the 303 state school districts operate with property tax bases that automatically increase 6 percent a year.

The measure asks voters to set new tax bases for the financially-strapped districts. HJR1 has come under fire from some legislators, who claim that constituents in troubled districts do not want the state to force a property tax levy upon them.

Gov. Neil Goldschmidt also has criticized the plan for not including a property tax relief program. Rep. Carl Hosticka

(D-Eugene), chairman of the House Revenue Committee, made the decision early in the session to separate the issues.

Goldschmidt also disagreed with the decision not to place a two-year moratorium on additional tax levies. A few weeks ago, the governor threatened to pull his support from the measure, but apparently has been mollified by a series of House bills passed Thursday which provide millions of dollars in relief aid to special education programs and financially troubled school districts.

So far, the House and Senate have disagreed on what to do with an additional \$45 million set aside for tax relief in Goldschmidt's proposed budget. The House approved a plan that would limit property tax payments to 4 percent of a household's yearly income, while the Senate has supported a proposal to target the money to individual school districts.

# Off-track betting means 'bettor' business for inn

By Greg Hough  
Emerald Reporter

The first week of off-track betting in the Eugene area was marked by screaming crowds cheering "their" horses on closed-circuit television live from the Portland Meadows racetrack.

The Country Squire Inn in Coburg, which began offering wagers on Portland Meadows races on March 2, has since averaged between 200 and 400 customers each day, according to the inn's sales manager, Laurie Meyers.

"Our beer and food sales have doubled this week," Meyers said. "We're getting a large variety of people for this."

The off-track betting, organized in tandem with Portland Meadows and the Oregon State Lottery Commission, was approved by the Oregon Legislature in 1987.

Four sites are currently open in the state and two more have been given tentative approval, according to Lottery Deputy Director Steve Caputo. Up to 10 sites are allowed by the 1987 legislation, said Caputo, who added that the Lottery Commission is supervising the wagering on a non-profit basis.

Meyers said she estimated the split between men and women bettors about even, with the average age anywhere from 21 to 75.

"I wouldn't target to one demographic with our advertising," Meyers said, "but I would target the tourism market. I think we can do very well with the out-of-town people."

The inn, located at 33100 Van Duyn Road, has an upstairs viewing area that seats 400, featuring one large-screen television and six smaller screens. There are currently four betting windows at the inn, with hopes to finish construction of two more by next week, Meyers said.

"The average bet has been about \$5-10," said Meyers, who said the inn splits a 5 percent take with the racetrack on bets.

Meyers said Portland Meadows had first approached the inn last year about being the Eugene site, and that negotiations between the two businesses and the state took about six months. A computer and communications network now links the two sites, she added.

The inn's betting parlor is open from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. Thursday and Friday, and 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Patrons can bet on all Portland Meadows races at those times, said Meyers, who added that a typical night features 10 races — one every 20 minutes.

Caputo said that after the Portland Meadows season ends April 30, it is unclear whether another racetrack will offer off-track betting until the horses begin to race again next fall.



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