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DeFazio builds legislation to stop violence in schools

■ Nine new bills make up a comprehensive package designed to make schools safer

By Kendall Larsen
Oregon Daily Emerald

After Kipland P. Kinkel's infamous shooting spree with a .22-caliber semiautomatic rifle May 21, 1998, which killed 4 and left 22 wounded in Thurston, the nation's attention became focused on ending school violence.

Now, with even more students attempting to bring firearms to school and injure their classmates, legislators are struggling to curb youth violence.

U.S. Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., introduced legislation Tuesday to increase funding for intervention services and limit children's access to firearms that they may obtain due to parental carelessness or gun shows that do not require background checks.

Kristie Greco, DeFazio's press secretary, said the nine bills provide a comprehensive package containing a variety of resources that would be offered to communities to solve youth violence problems.

"It addresses three things: prevention, intervention and it helps get guns out of the hands of children," Greco said.

The legislation would increase funding for programs dealing with learning disabilities, juvenile delin-

quency prevention and child abuse prevention. It also seeks to improve childcare services and expand the National Guard's Youth Challenge program for high school dropouts.

DeFazio's legislation would require background checks at gun shows, as well as provisions by gun manufacturers for trigger locks on all new firearms that are purchased.

In a report released last month, the attorney general's School/Community Safety Coalition said that although Oregon's public schools are reasonably safe, more must be done to reduce incidences of bullying, intimidation and harassment between students.

Oregon Attorney General Hardy Myers said in the report that such harassing behavior can sometimes result in acts of violence in school. The report also includes recommendations for new school-wide curriculum on anger management, drug and alcohol resistance and conflict resolution.

Greco said that DeFazio's legislation addresses the harassment issue by giving families numerous resources to help students build relationship skills both at home and at school.

Schools in the 4J District and surrounding areas are actively involved in creating such violence prevention programs.

John Lehmann, director of Educational Support Services, said that

the district is a recipient of a three-year grant called "Safe Schools, Healthy Students."

The grant allows the schools to have mental health therapists on staff, and for students to be referred to professional treatment if needed, Lehmann said.

The grant has also funded Eugene schools to hire unarmed crime prevention specialists. Lehmann said their presence in the schools gives the students a positive place to go when they have problems or conflicts.

Another program is Effective Behavior Support, which runs throughout the district.

"It helps create an environment where it is okay to speak up when you see something happening," Lehmann said.

Many of the intervention and prevention strategies are most effective when dealing with middle school children, Lehmann said.

Dan Stone, student services coordinator at Thurston High School, said the tragedy there helped raise awareness concerning school violence.

"One thing we learned from all of this is that you can't take anything for granted," Stone said. "You have to look at every conflict as a potential problem."

DeFazio's nine bills will now move to individual committees for consideration.

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