

GUEST EDITORIAL FROM THE CORVALLIS GAZETTE-TIMES

Taxes, schools grab spotlight in Capitol

With about two months remaining in the legislative session, we've reached the point at which the focus is narrowing onto the biggest and most contentious issues in the Capitol — and at least some Democrats are starting to sense that, despite their super-majorities in both chambers, they may not be able to win approval for all the items on their agenda.

In that light, it was interesting to note this comment from Speaker of the House Tina Kotek in a recent story in *The Oregonian*: "We only have so many super-majority votes in our pocket."

So, the question at this point becomes this: Where will legislative leaders choose to use those votes? Which agenda items will rise to the top? Which ones will be set aside? And how long can Democrats maintain those super-majorities, the three-fifths edge in each chamber that will allow them to pass revenue bills without the benefit of a single Republican vote?

And there's this as well: How will voters react if any of these bills are referred to them through the initiative process, which is likely? It's possible that ballot measures could undo much of the Legislature's work.

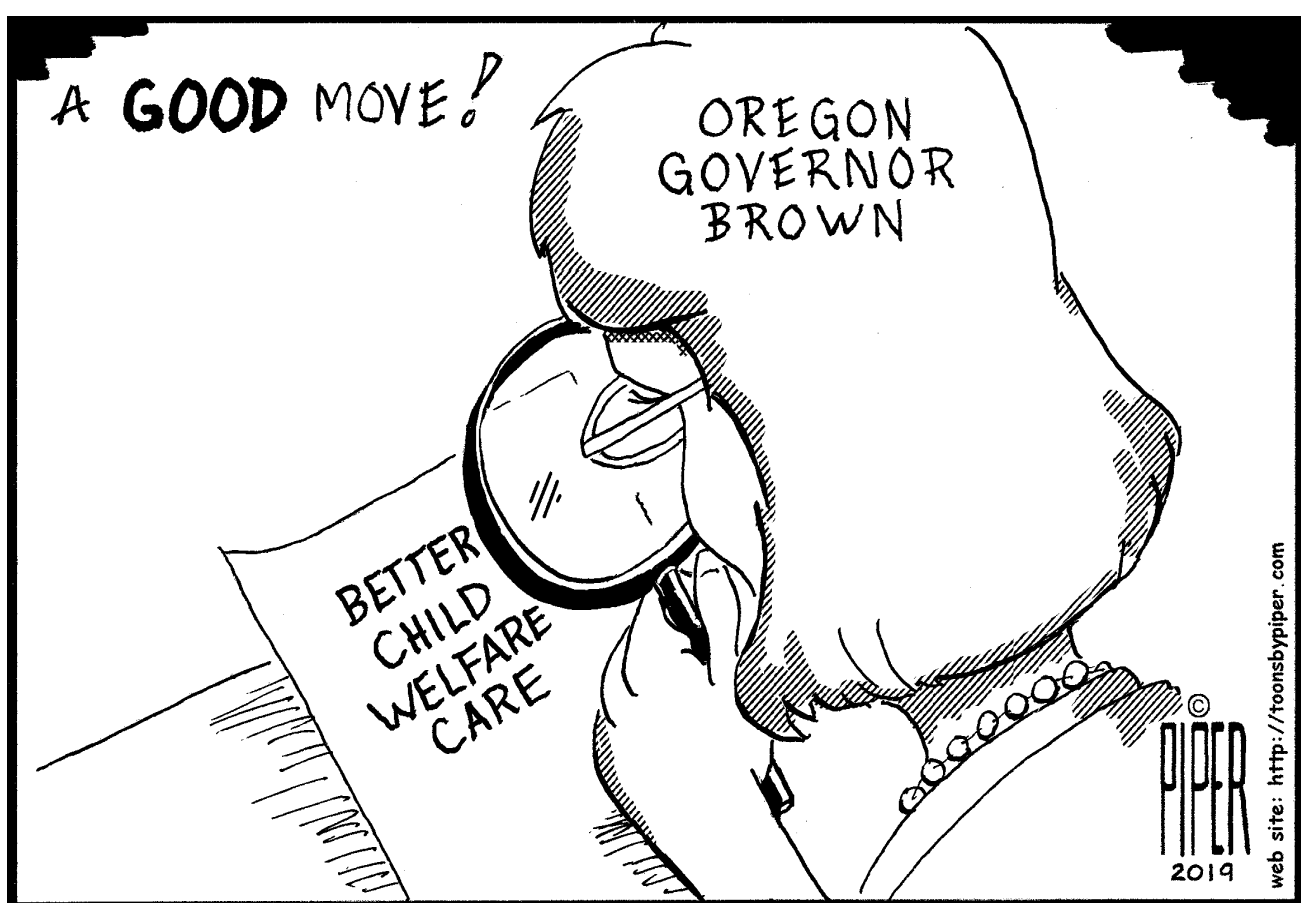
So it will be interesting to see what sort of alliances take shape over the final weeks of the session.

The top priority at this point, for both Gov. Kate Brown and legislative leaders, appears to be pushing through a proposed gross-receipts tax on Oregon businesses. The proposal, which would apply to businesses with at least \$1 million a year in Oregon sales, would generate an estimated \$1 billion a year for schools. But it's not yet clear where precisely the money would be spent, and that issue could drive a wedge between the governor and legislative leaders. The subcommittee where the taxation plan has been hammered out is an offshoot of the Joint Committee on School Success, which has been focused on K-12 education. Both Kotek and Senate President Peter Courtney last week sent signals that they believe the money should almost exclusively be spent on K-12 education. With teachers around the state scheduled to descend on Salem May 8 in an echo of similar protests by educators nationwide, you can be sure that legislators are starting to feel the pressure.

In fact, Kotek told reporters last week that if community colleges and universities want dedicated funding, "maybe that's next year's discussion."

The problem with that, of course, is that Oregon's community colleges and universities have been hearing "maybe next year" for decades now. Last year, when Brown was making her initial pitch for the tax on businesses, she broadly suggested that at least some of the money might go to Oregon higher education; her thinking then was that she'd need support from higher education officials and advocates to push through the business tax. Last week, she seemed to renew that pitch, saying that such support would be essential, especially if the tax were referred to voters. How the Democratic leaders resolve this conflict could well determine the fate of the business tax.

Adding to the complexity of all of this is the question of what to what extent reforms to Oregon's underfunded public pension system will have to go along with the business tax proposal. Part of this is practical: Without reform, increasing pension premiums likely will eat away a huge chunk of any additional revenue. And part of it may be political: The proposed tax might not muster the required three-fifths majorities if it doesn't go hand in hand with pension reforms.



Your views

Musselwhite: Former opponent of adjoining public trail is now a fan

To the Editor:

I am writing you today about our experience with the American Tobacco Trail in Apex, North Carolina. Ron Polk, a member of the Joseph Branch Trail Consortium, asked me to share my story with you.

Our property in a rural part of Wake County, North Carolina, adjoined an old railroad track that was no longer in use. A group of people formed to create the Planning Board of the American Tobacco Trail to turn the railbed into a recreational trail for runners, cyclists, horseback riders and individuals wanting to spend time in nature.

Being accustomed to the

peace and quiet of rural life, we were opposed to the trail and went as far as to join a group to halt the trail being created. There was talk of people on the trail trespassing, stealing or vandalizing personal property and potential threats to personal safety. After numerous public meetings, the American Tobacco Trail (ATT) was approved. Work began on the initial 6-mile portion of the trail, which has since been expanded to 26 miles.

At first, we were unhappy with the fact that we could see people using the trail from our home. As the months went by (without a single incident) we began using the trail for walks with our dog. I purchased a bike and began riding the length of the trail multiple times per week. We met

neighbors/friends out taking in the fresh air, exercising and enjoying nature. As time passed, we became ardent supporters of the ATT.

Walking year-round, we never experienced any issues. The people we encountered using the trail were respectful of others. We rarely saw any litter and, of course, picked it up if we did.

Running and biking events are held on the trail, and the ATT has become a very popular trail that promotes clean outdoor activity. In fact, we advertised the easy access to the ATT to help sell our home in Apex three years ago.

I hope this letter provides insight from the perspective of a landowner who was once opposed to a recreational trail, then had

Write to us

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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his mind changed by experiencing all the benefits of living next to it.

*John Musselwhite
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