

Lack of attention to state's ed budget causes concern, remedial legislation

By SCOTT JORGENSEN
IVN Staff Writer

Several budgets have already been passed by the Oregon Legislature since the start of this session in January, but as of now, no work has been done on the state's education budget.

And there is already a substantial difference between the dollar figures requested by education groups and what may end up being allocated.

Important Programs Yet Unfunded

According to Rep. Bruce Hanna (R-Roseburg), a member of the Legislature's budget-writing Ways and Means Committee, the Legislature already has appropriated a large amount of taxpayer dollars, but funding for some of the state's most important programs have yet to be considered.

"We have managed to spend some \$326 million out of the General Fund, but we've yet to have a co-chair's budget. We just keep approving budgets for General Fund money, but don't know what the big dollars will be for the larger budgets," Hanna said.

"We've been making decisions for all other fund budgets, small General Fund budgets, but the fact is, those that should be a priority were not taken up," he added.

The last two legislative sessions have stretched on into August, and on both occasions, the education budget was one of the last items passed. Joy Marshall, who serves as the Lane County organizer for education advocate group Oregon Stand for Children (SFC), said that such delays do a tremendous disservice to the state's schools and students.

District Planning Hampered

"It's not fair for the districts who have to figure out how many teachers they have to hire and for kids who don't know how big their classrooms are going to be," Marshall said. "Clearly, August is too late."

Three Rivers School District begins its budgeting process in early February, said Superintendent Jerry Fritts. Oregon's school districts begin their fiscal years on July 1, and base their budgets on estimates provided by the Oregon Dept. of Education (DOE).

Legislative remedies have been proposed to end the delays and force lawmakers to fund education as a priority item.

Resolution Offered

Sen. Jason Atkinson (R-Central Point) has sponsored Senate Joint Resolution (SJR) 16. If passed, the bill would require the Legislature to pass its education budget during the first 81 days of its session. Failure to do so would result in legislators forfeiting their pay until the education budget is passed.

Atkinson said that he has been working on such legislation for the last four years, and that it is long overdue.

"The K-12 budget bill is over half of the state budget and the single biggest item that we pay for," Atkinson said. "We all agree that it's the most important, but it's the last budget to pass."

Atkinson said he was inspired to draft the bill after examining how other states do their budgets.

"I looked at the states of Washington, Idaho, Utah

SFC plans to lobby the Legislature to fund education at \$6.3 billion, even though Gov. Kulongoski's proposed budget calls for \$6.06 billion.

'More Funding' needed

Marshall points out that Oregon's schools have the fourth-largest class sizes in the nation; its elementary schools have the second-largest class sizes in the nation; and the state has one of the shortest school years in the nation. More funding would solve those issues, Marshall said.

"What we're asking for is very reasonable and very needed," Marshall said.

SFC is planning to hold rallies all over the state to coincide with the May 15 revenue forecast, Marshall said. However, the organization remains undecided on legislative measures such as SJR 16 and HJR 21.

"I'm not sure if we have a position on that," Marshall said.

Hanna said that at this point, it "sure doesn't seem likely to me" that the state's education budget will be funded during the first 81 days of this session, or any time soon. It's also unlikely that SJR 16 or HJR 21 will receive so much as a public hearing before the 2007 Legislature adjourns.

Ed Budget Needs Priority - Atkinson

However, Atkinson said he will continue his push to pass the education budget as a priority item. Part of SJR 16 includes referring the matter to voters, and Atkinson said that if given the chance, Oregon citizens would support it.

"I want the people of Oregon to hold the Legislature accountable for passing and forcing that kind of change on the Legislature to pass that budget first," Atkinson said. "That's why I prefer this concept, is it allows voters to say, 'Yes, we support this.'"

"It also allows voters to say, 'We voted for it, now do it.'"

Psoriasis aid offered free by nonprofit

Psoriasis is a chronic skin condition that affects as many as one in 50 Americans, yet many sufferers may feel isolated as they struggle to understand and treat this life-altering disease.

To help these individuals feel less alone and increase their understanding of the disease, Psoriasis Cure Now, a nonprofit patient advocacy group, is offering a series of free educational podcasts at www.psoriasis curenow.org. (NewsUSA)

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VARSITY BASEBALL AND SOFTBALL nonleague contests were held at Illinois Valley High School on Saturday, March 17. The Cougar baseball squad (above) split a double-header against Cascade Christian; the score was in I.V.'s favor 14-0 in the first game, but Cascade took the second game 12-3. For the Cougars, Doug Hoskins, Andrew Augustadt and Cory Glasgow each had two hits. Jack Anderson scored three times, and I.V.'s Austin Hocker was the winning pitcher. The girls (below) lost to Cascade 14-9, 10-1. Samantha Hoskins had a double and a triple for I.V. in the nightcap. (Photos by Dale & Elaine Sandberg/Illinois Valley News)



Chamber eyes fixing up 'Welcome' signs

Illinois Valley Chamber of Commerce aims to repair or replace the "Welcome" signs along Redwood Hwy.

Directors Jim Frick and Bob Rodriguez are working to gather information and bids. One sign, on Hay's Hill, was damaged by fire Nov. 11 when a pickup truck crashed and ignited.

The other sign, near Rough & Ready Lumber Co., for northbound traffic, is faded and needs repair.

"We should get these in shape before the summer tourism season," said chamber board President Alice Schaffer.

In other matters during the board meeting Tuesday, March 13 at Wild River Brewing & Pizza Co., chamber directors:

*Were advised by Dulcie Moore, secretary and office manager, that 164 persons were recorded at I.V. Visitor Center during February, a drop of 218 from February 2006. "Snow days" were the likely cause.

*Heard from Moore that she works at the center from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays.

*Learned that the next chamber mixer will be held Friday, April 13 at Eye Care Group on Caves Hwy.

*Found that the annual Bluegrass Festival at Lake Selmac is scheduled for July 21, and that word on renting the space is awaited from Josephine County Parks & Recreation Dept.

*Discovered that Moore received 100 phone calls during February, and that she sent 40 information packets; 35 of them for those seeking tourism data.

*Agreed that a committee will review chamber bylaws to see if they need updating or revision.

*Received thanks from

Frick for the lifetime achievements recognition afforded his father, Leonard Frick, during the annual awards meeting. "It meant more than you can know," said the younger Frick.

*Heard of a proposal by I.V. Merchants Association to trade membership lists, but took no action.

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