

# Sen. Phil Lowry Sees Lack of Leadership; Discusses Complications of School Bills

By STATE SENATOR PHILIP LOWRY

Salem — After 86 days of struggling this Legislature is still suffering from a lack of leadership. The two dominant issues of the session, taxation and education, are badly bogged down. The result of this lack of leadership may well be haphazard or expedient compromise. This results far less from party partisanship than might be supposed. Most of the partisanship on the education issue is geographical and intra-party.

On the tax issue, most of the controversy is necessarily among the Democrats, because the Republican tax program was discarded by the Democrat majority in the House of Representatives in the early days of the session. Both the House and Senate Education and Taxation Committees are controlled by the Democrats. The Democrats, in attempting to devise a tax program, have been left in an awkward position by the Governor. Both parties are confused by the Governor's failure to make any concrete budget recommendations. According to the grapevine, the Governor isn't going to say anything directly on this subject if it can possibly be avoided.

**How To Speed**  
The Democrats themselves are in serious disagreement as to how much money should be spent, because it is now apparent that not all of the campaign promises can be kept if the taxpayer is to be considered seriously. The reason for this state of affairs goes back to the campaign for the Governorship. Inconsistent promises were made which amounted to commitment for tax relief and for vastly increased state aid for a variety of projects. The parties making the promises recklessly ignored how much it would cost the taxpayers to keep them. They now find you can't spend heavily without taxing heavily, and you can't tax heavily without raising a storm of public protest. The parties promised are now in Salem demanding performance. Notably, on the education issue, the Governor has been charged by a member of his own party with "double crossing and selling education down the river."

The result is a hopeless political dilemma which has prevented an honest presentation of the facts to the public. Apparently the Governor hopes that the Legislature will have to absorb the blame for any broken promises, but the Legislators, themselves, of both parties aren't about to be used as the "scape goat."

There is no substitute for telling the people the plain, unvarnished facts, no matter how unpleasant they may be, both before and after an election. It is my belief that the people of Oregon will respond to an honestly presented, progressive program which is necessary. Actually taxation is, in my opinion, secondary to the education issue at this session, because the education decisions will have substantial control over the tax program.

There are four fundamental education issues before us: (1) The so-called Key District Plan contained in Senate Bill 64, of which I am one of the bipartisan co-sponsors. This bill would revise the formula, now badly out of balance, for distributing millions of dollars of State general funds to the local school districts in Oregon. The present law for distributing these funds has produced a situation where the counties with the greatest tax resources are getting more and more of the State general fund at the expense of the counties with limited tax resources.

Portland and some Eastern Oregon counties are bitterly resisting this bill because it would deny them the undue advantages which they are now receiving under the present law. Last session, the Senate passed a bill, but the opposition killed it in the House Education Committee. The "rich districts" have counter-attacked with a bill of their own. It is obvious they do not feel sufficiently strong at this session to simply rely on killing Senate Bill 64. They now acknowledge some inequity in the present law, which they contend can be corrected with their bill, but their proposal would retain a large part of the advantage they now enjoy.

**Theory Devised**  
Senate Bill 64 means a tremendous amount in dollars and cents to counties such as Jackson. The basic theory of the bill was devised by a group of outstanding educators, including our own superintendents, Leonard Mayfield and Alf Mekvold. My mail indicates unanimous support of the public and all units of education in Jackson county for this bill. The bill is based on the belief that education in Oregon is a state function, as stated in the Oregon Constitution, and that we must reasonably educate our children where they live, irrespective of

the tax revenues available to the district in which the children live. It absolutely does not deprive local districts of the control of their own operations, nor does it require any additional taxes. It simply redistributes tax revenues already imposed. Both parties are split wide open on this bill. Any partisanship on this issue is entirely geographical.

Endorsement of this bill by the Oregon Education Association has produced an extremely violent reaction from the Portland membership of that group. Truce meetings between the proponents and the opponents of Senate Bill 64 have not been productive of any compromise, because the issue is so fundamental.

**Sound Principle**  
It is my firm conviction that Senate Bill 64 sets forth a sound educational principle and the Basic Fund distribution proposed under it is fair to all parts of the state.

Just as explosive is House Bill 171, which would increase state aid from \$80 to \$120 per school census child. State taxes now pay less than one-third of the costs of elementary and secondary education in Oregon. The balance is made up by local property taxes. This bill would have the effect of requiring the state to pay approximately one-half of the cost of elementary and secondary education with the balance to be paid out of local taxes. House Bill 171 could be one of the big "squeeze plays" of the session. Some Democrats and some Republicans still hope that this bill will be enacted. Others, however, have simply come out and said there should be no increase beyond \$90.

I believe many of the Republicans in the Senate would seriously consider the full increase to \$120, if the increase were fully offset locally by reduced property taxes.

**Would Shift Burden**  
In any event, the Republicans will try to insist that any increase go back to the local school districts as a direct budget receipt within the six per cent limitation. No increase or decrease in total taxation would be involved. However, there would be a shift of the burden of taxation from the local property taxpayer to those taxpayers contributing to the State General Fund. By insisting upon these conditions, any increase in the Basic Fund would not simply be an additional expenditure for education but would be a direct local property tax offset. It would also have the merit of meeting our educational needs.

Under this arrangement, if local voters wanted to exceed this amount, they would have to vote for school budgets outside the six per cent limitation. Nobody should be deceived that this means any less overall tax bill in Oregon. It doesn't. However, I think it would be perilous to vote any increase in the Basic Fund without giving the local property taxpayers the suggested protection. Otherwise, we have simply called upon our taxpayers to pay more taxes at the State level with the probability that the local taxes would soon climb back up as high as before.

**Increasingly Concerned**  
I have become increasingly concerned over the plight of local property taxpayers. Farmers appear to be carrying a disproportionate share of the tax burden in some areas, and the unfortunate fact is that local property taxes fall due whether there has been any income to pay them or not. My mail also indicates there is a terrific squeeze on the modest property home owners, often beyond the working age, who have a limited or fixed income. To some of these people, already hurt by inflation, a mounting property tax bill is a real hardship. The dividing line here between the independent, self-sus-

taining, low-income citizen and a welfare case is getting pretty thin.)

Another feature of the apparently developing "squeeze play" in education is the effort to connect the increase in the Basic Fund to Senate Bill 64. If Portland can get the increase as high as \$10 per census child, it will soften the opposition to Senate Bill 64, because Portland would then receive no less than at present. No doubt, a move will be attempted to tie Senate Bill 64 with an increase in the Basic Fund. This I think would be a great mistake. Both matters should be decided independently on their own merits. Also, if we increase the Basic Fund without a sound revision in the distribution formula, counties such as Jackson could be left in a bad position.

**Enrollments Up**  
Any way you look at it, mounting school enrollments and increasing costs can only mean more taxes to educate our children. If the State does not provide additional help, the inevitable increased cost will fall on locally owned property. The only advantage to this is that local tax dollars are spent more efficiently than at the state level. It also tends to prevent extravagance and useless frills in education. Our real concern should be the net product of education and not simply the physical surroundings in which it functions.

The problems discussed here are really most difficult of sound solution. It will take sensible leadership, taxes and public interest to solve them.

**Bill To Abolish Fair Commission In 4-4 Deadlock**

Salem—UP—A bill to abolish the State Fair Commission and put the fair back under the direction of the State Department of Agriculture remained in the Senate Agriculture Committee today after failing to pass out to the floor with a "do pass" recommendation.

The vote was four Republicans against the move to pass the bill out favorably and four Democrats in favor. The fifth Republican on the committee, Sen. Francis W. Ziegler of Corvallis, explained he had not made up his mind.

**Apparently Not Killed**  
Members said the unusual tie vote action in committee apparently did not "kill" the bill or "lay it on the table." But they said it just remained in committee and might be brought up for action at a future date.

The legislation was recommended by Gov. Robert D. Holmes, who said he thought the emphasis would be more on agriculture and less on "carnival" if the fair was placed back under the Agriculture Department where it was until 1951, when the Legislature created the fair commission.

Voting to bring out the bill with a favorable recommendation were Democratic Sens. Dwight Hopkins of Imbler, Ben Musa of The Dalles, Andrew J. Naterlin of Newport and Monroe Sweetland of Milwaukie.

**Opposition Votes**  
And voting against the motion were Republican Sens. C. D. Cameron of Gar- 'n Pass, Walter C. Leth of Monmouth, Leander Quiring of Hermiston and Truman A. Chase of Eugene, chairman of the committee.

Sen. Quiring, in explaining his vote, said he thought the time element was involved. He said the fair, which opens the Saturday before Labor day, already is behind schedule in arranging its premium books and other plans, and he thought the directing body should remain as it is for the present.

**Badden Submits Low Bid for FS Timber**

Cave Junction—Francis Badden, Cave Junction logging contractor, was the successful bidder at two oral auction timber sales held March 19 at the Illinois Valley ranger station.

Badden bid \$199.20 for 24,000 feet of Port Orford cedar on Forest service land in the Grayback creek area. He bid \$523 for 32,000 feet of Douglas fir and white fir in the Lake creek area. Other bidders were: Ael Lund on the Grayback timber and Alfred Mellow on the Lake creek sale.

Another forest service timber sale has been called for April 2 when oral bids will be received for 32,000 feet of Douglas fir and white fir in the Oregon Caves Resort dumping area.

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