

Legislators, school officials agree on problems, not on solutions

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son said "All the rabbits have been pulled out of the hat." The only dissenting opinion was that of Sen. Charles Starr (R-Hillsboro), who said that the consequences "would not be as dire as most as most would have you believe."

Cuts in service directly related to tax decrease

Rep. Charlie Ringo (D-Beaverton) said that he hoped that the public would see the direct correlation between cuts in services in public safety, schools and human services and decreases in tax revenues. Echoing Johnson, Rep. Mark Hass (D-Portland) said that while consequences [of inadequate funding] were now dire, the future consequences would be worse. Hass said that a strong educational system and a strong economy go hand-in-hand. The consensus was that Oregon has enjoyed a reputation as having a good school system in the past but that the state's reputation has already started to slip. Sen. Ryan Deckert (D-Beaverton) said that decline in the quality of public education would be gradual, but recovery would be very hard and very slow. Deckert said that Oregonians must "change the system or accept a lot less in services and not as good an education for children."

Across-the-board cuts won't be stopped

When asked if the menu of across-the-board cuts approved by the last special session will automatically be ac-

cepted if Measure 28 fails, legislators agreed that all members will attempt to hold schools harmless but that the math of the budget was against complete success. Since schools receive 42 percent of the state budget, taking all of the needed cuts from the remaining 58 percent of the budget could be impossible.

"If the legislature was doing their job..."

Rep. Max Williams (R-Tigard), voiced the consensus, saying "if the legislature was doing their job" they should be discussing a package of significant reforms that would make major structural changes in the Oregon tax revenue system.

Williams outlined a long-term solution for a new tax model that has general agreement among many legislators. This could include a decrease in business and personal income tax and capital gains tax, a re-opening of property tax limitations and some form of consumption (sales) tax. The hard part, according to several legislators, would be to bring the public to accept tax reform by simultaneously enacting broad budget reforms, including reform of the PERS system.

Equalization of ESD \$\$ should help NWRES

According to schools lobbyist Ozzie Rose, Washington and Multnomah Counties "export" between 24-26 percent of their tax revenue to support poorer districts across the state as a result of school funding equalization. The final step of

the equalization process was begun in the last legislative session when the legislature agreed to a five-year ESD equalization plan. Currently, NWRES receives \$19.2 million, compared to Multnomah ESD's \$35.2 million for almost the same number of students.

Ringo wants more funds for Metro schools

While supporting the effort to reach a state-wide solution to the funding crisis Rep. Ringo and Sen. Deckert said that, if a state-wide solution cannot be reached, they would propose a local solution for the metropolitan districts. Ringo said that during his recent re-election campaign constituents were "begging him to raise their taxes" and that he thinks the public is ready for major change if they can be shown that the legislature is spending the dollars as wisely as possible. Ringo concluded by saying that, if the rest of the state prevents passage (of a new revenue source), he "does not think that the Beaverton-Metro schools should be dragged down to the lowest common denominator."

After the panel discussion, an audience member contested Ringo's statement, and was rewarded with general applause, when he said that local taxpayers are already paying as much as they are able to afford but that all children across the state deserve the same, good education.

The final question put to the panel of legislators was how district superintendents and school board members could

be effective during the legislative session. Beyond the usual statements that legislators get information from local people, legislators urged the audience to make discussions with their legislators personal, to take the time for a phone call or handwritten note. Rep. Johnson said, to laughter from several of her colleagues, that piles of identical postcards go immediately to recycling. She urged people to gather groups together in their communities to begin dialogue with their legislators and help spread the message. Johnson also said that it was very important that school supporters be "responsive and re-

ceptive to others affected", such as corrections and health and human services. Legislators told the audience not to waste time "preaching to the converted" and to feel empowered to contact legislators outside of their district. Rep. Williams again stated the consensus, by saying that any reform package would be a very difficult sell and that the choices made now would affect the state for the next twenty years or more. He said that school board members have a responsibility to educate the public about the complications of the system and the complexity of education funding.

Common School Fund distributes extra \$17.7 million

At the end of December, the Division of State Lands distributed nearly \$25 million from the Common School Fund, including a one-time supplemental distribution of \$17.7 million for use by K-12 public schools. The supplemental distribution was ordered earlier this year by the third special session of the legislature.

The funds derive from revenue deposited in the Common School Fund during the past 50 years from activities such as waterway leases, permit fees and fines. The remaining \$7.3 million allocation is the regular distribution, which comes from earnings on the CSF. County treasurers will forward the funds to school districts within two weeks of receipt.

DSL distributed \$7.8 million from the CSF for schools in June. By law, the funds are dedicated to "support and maintenance of common

schools in each school district." County population ages 4-20 determine each county's share of earnings.

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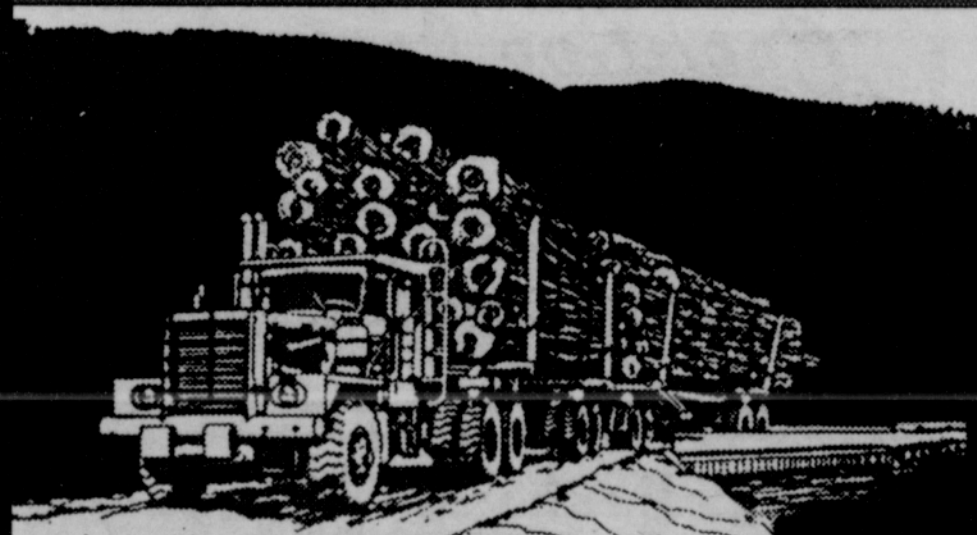
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