

Legislative Update

By Betsy Johnson,
Rep., District 31

Budget talks are progressing slowly, with Democrats and Republicans reported to be approximately \$1 billion apart on their spending recommendations.

With only a few days left before the unofficial and unrealistic July 4th target for the close of the 2003 Oregon legislative session, the House passed a measure on June 26 to keep the state government operating into the next fiscal year that begins on July 1. The measure passed 58-1 without debate, and is expected to clear the Senate in time to be signed into law by the June 30 deadline.

Most state-supported agencies do not have budgets for the next two-year budget cycle. House Bill 5065 will allow most agencies to continue spending at current levels until July 31, while legislators continue negotiations on the 2003-05 budget.

Budget considerations pending

As legislators draw closer to agreement on a budget in the weeks to come, they will focus their attention on the following unresolved budget issues and legislation:

- Either craft a serious tax reform plan for Oregon or at least create a meaningful process leading to a new system of public finance.
- Deliver the \$5.3 billion budget for schools that the Democrats and Gov. Ted Kulongoski are advocating. A smaller school budget, or one inflated with the addition of uncertain employment retirement savings, will only lead to a repeat of the past year that saw early school closures and loss of instruction time for students.
- Agree on a dedicated source of funding for the Oregon State Police. While some legislators are recommending an insurance surcharge, the governor is still pressing to put the state police back on the gasoline tax. Either approach is better than continuing to dismantle one of the state's most important services.
- Senate approval of a transportation bill that will provide nearly \$2 billion over the next decade to repair and upgrade roads, bridges and streets throughout the state. House Bill 2041, which will increase auto registration fees and truck taxes for road and bridge work, was approved on June 23 by a vote of 48-11, with Democrats supporting it unanimously. This bill now moves to the evenly split Senate, where Rick Metsger, chairman of the Transportation Committee, predicts it will pass easily.
- Approve a successor plan for the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS). After months of negotiations, legislators announced a compromise on June 26 that would create a less expensive retirement system for new hires. The proposed plan combines the features of a 401(k)-style investment account and a traditional

pension based on years of service and final salary. The plan has the support of employers, most public employee unions and Gov. Kulongoski. It's considered one of the key elements in reforming Oregon's PERS, which is approximately \$17 billion short of meeting its financial commitments for the next 25 years.

- Negotiate an agreement between local governments and the tourism industry over a new statewide one-percent hotel-motel room tax. Most legislators agree that there is a need to raise money to aggressively market Oregon as a tourist attraction.
- Fix the kicker law. It is painfully clear that Oregon needs a rainy day fund. The Senate has passed a proposal to convert the tax kicker into a savings fund for the state. The bill now moves to the House for approval.
- Approve a statewide health-insurance benefit pool for school employees. Other than retirement costs, school districts are facing no greater challenge than the increased costs of health care benefits.

State sales tax on agenda

A group of House Republicans has persuaded Speaker Karen Minnis to schedule a two-week series of public hearings on the overhaul of Oregon's tax system – focusing primarily on the pros and cons of a sales tax.

Beginning June 30, the House Revenue Committee will conduct daily hearings at 8:30 a.m. to review the current tax structure and a range of options for changing it. The emphasis is expected to be on a possible sales tax, with potential reductions in other taxes including income, estate and capital gains. **Citizens wishing to testify should contact the Legislative Revenue Office at 503.986.1266 for scheduling testimony.**

Leaders of the effort – Republican Reps. Max Williams of Tigard and Ben Westlund of Bend – hope the hearings produce a tax proposal that would be decided by the Legislature this session – not by voters.

If successful, the effort would be a historic moment for Oregon, one of five remaining states without a general sales tax. Voters have rejected sales tax measures nine times, most recently in 1993, and the Legislature has never adopted a general sales tax on its own. However, nothing prevents the Legislature from doing so, according to Paul Warner, the legislative revenue chief, who says most states that have sales taxes adopted them legislatively.

I would be interested in hearing your thoughts on this very controversial matter. You can e-mail me at <rep.betsyjohnson@state.or.us> or call me at 503-986-1431. For additional information on what's going on within the district and the dates and locations of my next Town Hall meetings, check my Web site, <www.betsyjohnson.com>.

ground squirrel has figured out that not all of the seed shells on the ground are empty. The humming birds, of course, spend more time fighting than drinking from their feeder.

Have a safe and fun summer.

Izaak Walton League
Nehalem Valley Chapter meets monthly on the third Thursday at 7:00 p.m. Call (503) 429-7193 for location.

Letters

Join us for a parade and fireworks

To the Editor:

We are hoping for a great turnout for our July 4 Parade. We are expecting Uncle Sam to be in the parade. As usual, we will start the parade at Weed Avenue by City Hall. This year, we will go past WGS and exit onto California Avenue. Walk around to the back of the school where Vernonia Pride will be handing out bags of candy to our parade participants. The Cub Scouts and the Booster Club will be having their stands open, selling their usual fare.

Vernonia pride does not charge a regular fee for you to watch the fireworks, but we do ask for donations to cover the cost of the fireworks. We will be accepting donations after the fireworks display as you are leaving the grounds. Please help us reach our goal of \$3,500 to cover the cost. Thank you and Happy 4th of July.

Enid Parrow
Vernonia Pride Member

Thank you, Georgia Pacific

To the Editor:

Frequently in these times we get a them against us attitude when we think about big businesses in our communities. I would like to tell you about a business whose management and employees are consistently working in our communities to make lives better. That company is Georgia Pacific, the Wauna Mill.

Recently Dick Wenger the mill manager received a leather NASCAR jacket. (Georgia Pacific sponsors a car.) Dick donated the jacket to the United Way campaign committee to help raise money. They held a raffle and raised about \$1500. The money raised was shared between Clatsop County United Way, Columbia County United Way in Oregon and Cowlitz Wahkiakum United Way in Washington.

Not only are they a very supportive organization but they also understand giving back to your community and that every United Way is autonomous. So whenever there is a fund raising event or campaign the money raised is shared by each of the United Way organizations represented by the employees

of Georgia Pacific.

The employees and management help not only with fund raising events to support many different organizations or specific projects but also volunteer in the community. The Company donates paper product to not for profit organizations.

United Way of Columbia County would like to say a big THANK YOU to Dick Wenger for all his support and dedication to our communities. Dick and Georgia Pacific are "Neighbors Helping Neighbors."

Sincerely,
Kathye Beck,
Executive Director
United Way of Columbia
County

Land Use board a pleasant surprise

To the Editor:

The Columbia County Land Use Planning Board deliberated June 30th over testimony, text, and recommendations by the County Department of Land Development Services staff. At issue was the adoption of the Periodic Review Work Program IV, Goal 5 Sensitive Lands, to revise wetland and riparian protection measures to comply with the State of Oregon "Safe Harbor" rules, to adopt the 1995 Beak Consultants map, and update provisions for threatened and endangered species, big game habitat and historical inventory.

Prior to observing this Board's deliberation, I held the negative view that the Board was maneuvering, or being maneuvered, into passing a set of recommendations giving the Board of Commissioners the backing to add more regulations on property owners, and add more charges, fees, and penalties for their normal use of their own property. What I observed was the desire to lessen property owner's restrictions, to allow them greater access for personal use of their own property, and less cost for doing so.

The attending Commission members were Chairman Jeffrey VanNatta, Peter Brewer, Dennis Nelson, Marvin MacDonald, Mona Pierce, and David Middle. Representing the Department of Land Development Services were chief planner Glen C. Higgins, MPA, and Sara Tieson, who was charged with presenting the revisions to

Please see page 16

Ike Says, cont. . .

From page 2

er districts being affected by hair loss syndrome have reduced their antlerless tags.

Recently Donna and I have added a hummingbird feeder and a seed feeder at our house. It is amazing how quickly the birds find these feeders. It is quite entertaining to watch all the different birds using the seed feeder and a local