



Representative Phil Barnhart (HD-11)

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

March 31, 2005

Contact: Jacquelyn Jeys, 503.986.1411

Barnhart fights against more cuts to schools

Eugene Democrat urges vote to prevent bigger class sizes, shorter school year

SALEM—Assistant House Democratic Leader Phil Barnhart (D-Eugene) led an effort to force a vote in the House Thursday on a bill that would have staved off more budget cuts for schools. House Republicans, however, killed the measure on a party-line vote.

“It is critical that we vote on financial support to public schools today, because school districts have already begun budgeting for the next biennium,” Barnhart told his colleagues on the floor of the House. “Every district needs to know just how much money the Legislature will make available for the coming two-year budget cycle—it’s just that simple.”

The bill, HB 2858, would have appropriated \$5.4 billion to K-12 education, the amount most advocates for schools and Senate Democrats say is minimally necessary to prevent layoffs of teachers, shortening the school year, and cutting valuable academic programs. On January 25, Barnhart and the House Democrats “drew a line in the sand,” vowing to oppose any budget that requires such cuts.

“This is not merely a procedural vote—the eyes of Oregon are upon us today,” Barnhart declared. “We have it within our power to make a real difference for our state.”

Time and time again, Barnhart said, the key leaders of House have committed to funding education first. “Now is the time to make good on that commitment,” Barnhart said.

Barnhart said the Legislature should keep the promise that virtually every legislator made to the voters—that support for public schools would be the highest priority. The Legislature has already been in session for almost three months without taking action to keep that promise, Barnhart said.

Barnhart referred to recent news reports that Oregon's national ranking in funding per student has dropped dramatically. "We now rank low in the bottom half of all states," Barnhart said. "By voting on HB 2858 today, we can give real life to the commitments we've made to voters, our constituents, and to school children across Oregon.

Despite Republican resistance to full funding for schools in the House, however, the issue may not be dead. Barnhart noted that the budget process in the Joint Ways and Means Committee is under way, and that the co-chairs of the committee may yet find a way to prevent cuts to schools.