

Representative Phil Barnhart

P R E S S R E L E A S E



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Barnhart Goes Back to School

Visits Creswell High School and Pleasant Hill Elementary

CRESWELL – Rep. Phil Barnhart (D-Central Lane and Linn Counties) visited district schools Friday to help students better understand government and the role of state representatives. At a Creswell High School economics class, taught by Bill Martin, Barnhart led a budget committee simulation that helped students better understand the budget pressures the state is facing.

Students formed into groups of legislators and lobbyists. The lobby groups included anti-tax, K-12 education, universities and community colleges, human services and public safety lobbyists. Each group presented their lobby group's point of view to the legislators in order to persuade them to fund their program, raise or cut taxes or cut other programs to live within the state budget.

As students presented their cases to the committee of four student legislators and one student teacher, lobby groups passed notes to the legislators to rebut arguments just like lobbyists do in the Capitol.

When lobby presentations were over, the budget deliberations began. Using all the information they were given, legislators were hesitant to cut any programs, but finally tried to create room for education funding by cutting public safety and raising taxes. They voted to increase spending on human services and universities and community colleges. However, they noted that they did not want to raise taxes too much because of concerns about potential voter backlash.

“The students are learning just how difficult it is to write a state budget in this current situation,” said Barnhart. “They learn the issues quickly, but find it just as hard to balance the budget as the real Legislature.”

Later in the day, Rep. Barnhart visited one of Pleasant Hill's fourth grade elementary classes and answered questions the students had prepared for him. “Have you ever been to the top of the capitol building?” they asked. “Not yet. I think you will probably beat me to it,” answered Barnhart, referring to their upcoming Capitol visit on Wednesday.

Pleasant Hill Elementary and Middle Schools held a joint assembly where Barnhart presented awards of academic excellence to fourth through sixth grade students. Afterwards he spoke to students who are running for the school's first-ever student council positions. “When you are elected, you will have the honor of becoming the these student's trusted representatives. As leaders, you will have to learn to take on difficult questions,” said Barnhart.

Barnhart was very impressed by the caliber of the students in both Creswell and Pleasant Hill. “Our (Creswell and Pleasant Hill) communities are doing a marvelous job of educating the next generation. If the students I met today are any indication, we can look forward to a very bright future.”