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STATE SENATOR
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OREGON STATE SENATE

May 28, 2019

Re: PERS Reform Moving Forward

Over the holiday weekend I reflected on the interaction and vote we had on this floor Thursday on PERS, which some members called one of the hardest votes they've ever taken. I rise today to ask that **we clearly remember** the dynamics that shaped and determined that vote. If we do, we'll increase the odds that when another PERS bill comes to this chamber, and it surely will, we will make a decision we can be proud of.

I say that, Mr. President, because what I heard Thursday didn't suggest that anyone was proud to vote for SB 1049 from a policy perspective. I don't remember anyone praising its substance. What I did hear from some voting yes was that it wasn't a fair bill. Several said it wasn't adequate for addressing the PERS problem, that we'll be back here again dealing with it before long, AND that they're committed to having a better bill to support. THAT's what I want us to remember.

THE THEME I HEARD from those who voted yes was that the deficiencies of the bill were outweighed by the imperative of passing a PERS reform bill this session, and, in the words of some, this was the only bill that could make it out of the building this session. There was talk of feeling boxed into a corner, of having our backs against a wall. I'm asking that we remember THAT, and do some homework so that the next time a PERS bill comes to this floor, many of us can vote for it with full conviction, rather than because we have to defuse a ticking timebomb.

That will take leadership. It will take saying clearly to our citizens that this problem is continuously draining the resources public bodies need to provide basic services. It will take saying that this obligation belongs to all of us—we're not able to cancel the Tier I deal, that current public employees are NOT overpaid, and we have to pitch in together to pay this debt. It means being clear that the faster and more boldly we act, the sooner Oregon will get back on track. It will be putting out a call to action to all of Oregon: LET'S STEP UP AND DEAL WITH THIS CHALLENGE HEAD ON. LET'S GET THIS DONE.

It will take risking the anger and alienation of constituents and powerful groups that want some guy behind the tree to pay off this debt.

And of course, it will mean more than talking. There are dozens of potential ways to pay this debt. Over the coming months I plan to go through recent analysis of many of them, and with help from people more expert than me on revenue, suggest one or more packages

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that would pay this bill fairly, and without genuine hardship for anyone. That's an achievable task, and I'd like to hear from anyone who'd like to work on it.

A final comment, Mr. President. About THE BUILDING. The building mentioned in last week's debate, through which 1049 is the only PERS bill that could pass this session. We talk constantly about the building and what it will and won't permit. So much that I think we're in danger of forgetting that THE BUILDING IS US. **WE** are the ones, 90 legislators, who collectively decide what does and doesn't pass through the building. There's nobody else. If we strongly object to what's happening here, on PERS or anything else, our responsibility is to fight to change it rather than surrender so quickly to this alien force we call "The Building." The BUILDING IS US.

Let's remember last Thursday. If we want something better, let's create it. Let's expand what's possible in this building, so that we're prouder, more frequently, of our votes.