



NEWS

Oregon Legislature - House Democratic Caucus

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House Democrats Stand Strong for Education Funding

Support Constitutional Rainy Day Fund and Use of Education Stability Fund

SALEM – Oregon House Democrats today told students, parents and teachers gathered in Salem that they support a higher level of K-12 funding than included in the current Governor’s budget. That number – \$5.56 billion – is reduced from both the 09-11 and 07-09 funding levels for schools.

“We applaud the Governor for releasing a balanced budget that clearly shows the impacts on our education and human services systems from this global recession, and the loss of one-time federal funds that helped us over the past two years,” said House Democratic Leader Dave Hunt (D-Clackamas). “But the funding level currently proposed would lead to shortened school years and increased class sizes in many districts around Oregon. That’s not acceptable to us or to Oregon families.”

One option House Democrats support is using a portion of the state’s Education Stability Fund (ESF). By the end of the 11-13 biennium, there will be over \$300 million in the ESF. Originally, the 09-11 rebalance plan was to take \$35.5 million from that fund to fulfill the final funding for the current school year. An improving economy will allow the state to use its ending fund balance – rather than the reserve funds – to ensure no more cuts to schools this year.

“Our students are performing better and our teachers are working harder than ever even in these uncertain economic times,” said Education Committee Co-Chair Sara Gelser (D-Corvallis). “As we work on reforms that will continue those student improvements, reduce administrative costs and make our schools more efficient, we must not allow the school year to be shortened any further. Time in the classroom is a critical element to student success.”

House Democrats also support a Constitutional Rainy Day Fund and support directing a balanced portion of the kicker into that fund to prevent the need for deep service cuts or tax increases in future recessions.

“Our plan would call for strict constitutional limits on when those dollars could be used. Until we establish a dedicated funding source for our Rainy Day account, the fortunes of our state will rise and fall with the global economy. We need to stabilize funding for schools, public safety and human services as we continue to make state government more effective and efficient,” said House Revenue Co-Chair Phil Barnhart (Central Lane and Lynn Counties).

House Ways and Means Co-Chair Peter Buckley (D-Ashland) said there are some daunting challenges facing budget writers this session, but that reversing the downward spiral of education funding is a high priority.

“Our kids need an education system that is stable, efficient and provides them with the tools they need to compete in a world-wide economy. As we consider education reforms in the classroom, we also need to ensure a full school year and class sizes that allow for the best possible learning,” said Rep. Buckley.

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