

Thank you, Mr. President--

I'm going to guess that everyone in this chamber has received emails in the last month that say "Dear Senator, I understand and appreciate the difficult task ahead of you in rebalancing the state budget, but I'm writing to tell you it's crucial that you hold program X, Y or Z harmless from any cuts." More often than not, they go on to make a pretty strong case.

And I'll bet many of us responded by asking for their understanding that we're at moment when we have no choice but to make cuts we don't want to make, and that will include damage to some really important programs and services. And it's likely that you add to that a pledge along the lines of "I'll do all I can to minimize adverse effects on vulnerable Oregonians and the state programs that assist them."

Mr. President, I think we're violating that pledge. If we were doing all we reasonably can to minimize the pain, we would probably follow the lead of a growing number of states coupled to the federal income tax: they've elected to DECOUPLE their tax code from several new and under-noticed tax breaks in Congress' first COVID relief package. Evidence is that going along with these new federal tax breaks will give wealthy Oregonians, people who are not suffering from the pandemic's economic effects, \$225 million in new state tax breaks at the same time that we are cutting vital services that effect our most vulnerable citizens.

I won't argue that case today, both because the decision is not before us in this session and because I haven't vetted the relevant facts to the depth that's needed. I rise today simply to offer two propositions that I hope that everyone of us can agree with:

- 1) If there's grounded evidence that disconnecting would mean transferring hundreds of millions of dollars from BRAND NEW tax breaks for the most affluent Oregonians to vital service needs, or to replenishing critical reserve funds...if there's some reason to believe that's true, we have an obligation to study this possibility carefully to verify the facts, and make a decision based on those facts, and
- 2) We have a responsibility to be honest with Oregonians about those facts. Like most of you, I've received form-letter emails from self-identified mom-and-pop businesses, saying they can't BELIEVE we're planning to hurt them even more in these tough Covid days by taking away an important tax break they already have. If those claims are wrong, and they are, *it's up to us to say so*. And if we know of a group organizing those emails, we should tell them to knock it off. We should all be willing to say that strategically misleading the people we represent is not the road to good public policy.

Now, I'll go out on a limb and predict that if a bill to disconnect makes it to this floor in a future session, it won't get unanimous support. The plain fact is that we don't all agree on tax policy. But I still believe we have it in us to base that disagreement on the verifiable facts of the matter instead of maneuvering for political advantage. *We have to get better at that to craft for Oregonians the public policy they deserve.*