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Rep. Piluso: K-12 Funding Action Only the First Step

I want to thank everyone that has contacted me regarding the K-12 education budget for the 2015-2017 biennium. I have heard from school administrators, district employees, teachers, parents, students and other concerned community members.

Most important, I know the \$7.255 billion for K-12 is not enough. I understand the impact of inadequate school funding as a legislator, school board member and as a parent.

On March 23rd, the Speaker of the House and the Senate President announced they were pushing forward with the \$7.255 billion K-12 budget. It came to the House on March 31st. The purpose of approving this budget early is to protect it from potential cuts after the next revenue forecast in May. I voted yes to push forward to secure the highest level of K-12 funding now, without putting our public safety and human services budgets in peril, in case the May forecast does not provide additional revenue. This budget provides a necessary floor, and promises that the K-12 funding will not dip lower, something we could not promise without passing this bill.

Through more is needed, the proposed budget includes a lot of funding additions. These increases and improvements include:

- \$7.255 billion is \$305 million more than what former Governor Kitzhaber proposed, and \$600 million more than the 2013-2015 K-12 education budget
- Funding for full-day kindergarten—for the first time all school districts in Oregon will have full day kindergarten. This is big deal for working families and early education.
- An additional \$12.5 million to improve outcomes for English Language Learning students
- A \$2.5 million increase to ensure that every student who qualifies for reduced price lunches qualifies for free lunches
- \$17 million more for districts to help support students with disabilities

Included in the \$7.255 budget is a protective trigger that will increase school funding if there is more money available after the May revenue forecast—40% of any new revenue will go to the State School Fund.

In addition to the 40% trigger, I am also joining several colleagues to discuss what we can do this session to create more revenue in our state. Revenue reform is the only way to have a significant impact on the current funding situation. It is the only solution to the inevitable budget crunches we will face in the future if we continue to patch together a state budget through a system that never allows us to fully prioritize education.

There has been a lot of rhetoric in the Capitol over the past few days about needing to make tough choices when it comes to our budget. Voting to support a base budget of \$7.255 billion for K-12 education was a tough choice, but I think we have avoided even tougher choices down the road by passing this budget early and protecting K-12 funding in event that the next forecast does not supply more revenue.

Education has been and will remain a priority of mine and that is why I voted to protect K-12 funding with a base budget of \$7.255 billion. Moving the K-12 budget now was a first step, not a final step.