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CONTACT: Molly Woon (503) 986-1074
molly.woon@state.or.us

Senate Education Committee approves workforce development bills to improve skills, employ young workers *SB 175 establishes continuation of successful stimulus programs*

SALEM –The Senate Education and Workforce Development Committee approved a bill this afternoon that will set up two workforce development programs modeled after successful programs funded with federal stimulus dollars. SB 175 would create the “Putting Oregon Back to Work Program” to improve Oregon’s workforce skills and the “Oregon Youth Employment Program” to provide teenagers with valuable job experience.

“As Oregon regains its economic footing, it is crucial that we are making the right investments in our workforce,” said Senator Mark Hass (D-Beaverton), chair of the committee. “These initiatives have demonstrated that they are smart investments. Continuing them will both help younger generations enter the workforce and give Oregon workers the tools they need to keep our workforce competitive.”

The Oregon Youth Employment Program helps young people learn job skills through on-the-job experience. Currently, Oregon youth face an unemployment rate of over 30 percent and stiff competition for entry level jobs. This program will provide critical work experiences for youth while allowing them to earn high school and college credits, become job-ready, and earn money to support themselves. Businesses benefit by building their future workforce while gaining the contributions of these young workers.

The Oregon Employer Workforce Training Fund will help Oregon businesses find cost effective ways to meet worker training needs while increasing business competitiveness. Companies with similar needs can be brought together to more efficiently leverage training dollars, rather than each company investing separately. Matching funds from companies would stretch this public investment and training would be provided at times and places convenient to workers in order to increase participation and completion.

“Both of these proposals are excellent examples of successful public-private partnerships,” said Senator Suzanne Bonamici (D-NW Portland/Washington County). “Our business leaders know better than anyone the workforce demands Oregon faces. They’ve been at the table in developing these programs and their investment of time and money ensures that the programs’ success is mutually beneficial for the state, workers, local communities, and the businesses.”

Both programs proposed in SB 175 are products of the Oregon Workforce Partnership, a non-partisan,

private/public, statewide association that works to build a more highly skilled workforce to support and expand the state's economy. Their membership includes Oregon's seven Local Workforce Investment Boards, which are comprised of business leaders, educators, and local officials.

The bill now goes to the Ways and Means Committee for consideration.

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