

Worthy bills did not make '12 cut

By **KIM THATCHER**

With Oregon's unemployment rate still hovering at nearly 9 percent, it's clear that our economy is still not out of the woods. Yet, the state legislature could have done so much more during the recent February session to create a better environment for job creation in Oregon.

As a member of the legislative budget committee I know how frustrating it can be to maintain funding for public safety, schools and other important programs for Oregonians who need our help. Balancing the budget this session was a little tricky having \$340 million less than projected by our economists, \$42 million in previously unanticipated governor-promised state worker pay raises, and \$300 million in unrealized, but previously assumed, savings. Not everyone was happy with the result, but we tried our best in this short session to play the negative hand we were dealt.

While much of the legislative session was spent balancing the budget, there were plenty of opportunities to adopt some common sense reforms which would have helped the private sector grow and hire more employees. When more people have jobs in the private sector, it generates more tax revenue to pay for those critical services I mentioned.

Though I believe many of these concepts will be back for consideration next year, I will point out a few of the many reforms brought forward by legislators which did not gain enough support by lawmakers this year.

House Bill 4098 would have increased the sustainable harvesting of timber in Oregon State forests. Senate Bill 1592 would have added more flexibility to local land use laws in some of the smaller rural counties to enhance their economic development needs. House Bill 4076 would have temporarily reduced capital gains taxes during a time when capital investment is much needed. Senate Bill 1573 would have ended what is basically a sales tax on Oregon businesses by replacing the high tax on gross sales contained in Measure 67 with a reduced rate on taxable income.

These ideas alone would have added an estimated 5,700 new jobs pumping over a billion dollars into the economy and generating \$1.6 billion in tax revenue over the next five years. There were also many other bills left on the cutting room floor designed to curb burdensome government regulation and state spending which have especially negative impacts on small businesses.

One final measure I want to point out was a simple proposal I drafted (House Bill 4052) to require the use of the federal E-verify system for state government. This employment screening program would have given our state agencies another tool in their efforts to have a legal workforce.

I will continue to work with my colleagues at the Capitol as we prepare for the 2013 legislative session in an attempt to make Oregon a better place to do business, make a living, and raise a family. I encourage you to contact me with your ideas.

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