

Slash, save and struggle to keep schools open

With no end to the economic crisis in sight, the state must cling to its reserves while local districts try to save the school year

Oregon's state budget crisis is going to get worse. Much worse. That's what Oregonians must understand when they consider proposals by the governor and legislators to hold back more than \$1 billion for future spending, putting tremendous pressure on schools and perhaps even forcing some to close early this spring.

Gov. Ted Kulongoski's suggestion Thursday that Oregon school districts find their own savings to finish the school year, perhaps even by getting teachers to work a few days for free, will surely set off a furious backlash. But at a time when workers across state government — not to mention the cratering private sector — are taking furloughs and salary rollbacks, the governor is right to ask that school districts make the same hard budget choices.

We urge the Republican legislators, teachers unions and anxious parents and students who keep demanding that Oregon crack open its savings accounts, or cash out the new federal stimulus, to examine more carefully the state's awful budget choices.

When state economist Tom Potiowski presents his revenue forecast to the Legislature this morning, don't just look at the anticipated \$800 million hole in the state budget that ends June 30. Look at what is likely to be a several billion dollar slump in the forecast for the next two-year budget. And look at the escalating slide downward: A \$700 million revenue fall recorded from October through November is likely to have cascaded to twice that sum over the past three months.

No one knows where or when this slide will stop. As the governor said Thursday, "If you take what the general fund has lost in three months and extrapolate that out for the next seven forecasts, I'm telling you that you are looking at a number that is going to make you shudder." In fact, it is a number that approaches one-third of Oregon's entire general fund.

So, yes, while Oregon could easily tap its savings or the stimulus and finish out this school year, as so many people keep urging the Legislature to do, that

would be terribly shortsighted, imprudent policy. The governor and legislative budgeters are right to try to save everything they can for next year, and 2011, while limping through the rest of this budget.

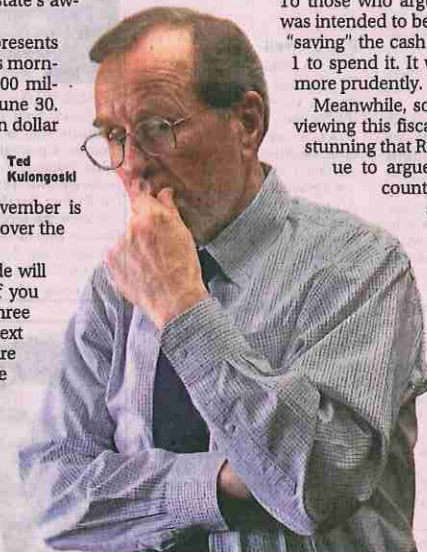
We're under no illusions about the difficulty of cutting \$100 million from Oregon schools over the next four months. And yes, many local teachers unions have language in their contracts designed to prevent reopening of salary and benefit agreements. Further, some districts, including Portland, have prudently managed their money and have reserve accounts of their own, while others have spent all their money and have little or none to use as backfill if the Legislature pulls back state money.

But school districts have to try. Oregon has to find savings all across state and local government — and school districts — to deal with this unprecedented funding spiral. It is not a guess, but a certainty, that next year's funding shortfall will be much worse than this one.

To those who argue that the federal stimulus money was intended to be spent quickly, it's worth noting that "saving" the cash essentially means waiting until July 1 to spend it. It will stimulate then, too, just slightly more prudently.

Meanwhile, some people in the Capitol persist in viewing this fiscal crisis through a political lens. It is stunning that Republicans in the Legislature continue to argue for tapping the state savings accounts. It is frustrating that labor unions and other liberal groups are pressing the tactical argument that spending state savings now would make a stronger case for an income tax surcharge later.

Oregonians should instead line up behind the governor and the lawmakers trying, in the face of a historic economic crisis, to do the hard, prudent, fiscally responsible thing. Oregon must take some painful cuts this spring, it must scramble to keep its schools open, and most of all, it must save for the hard times still ahead.



Ted Kulongoski

PCC leads the way on tobacco

Hats off to Portland Community College for providing smoke-free campuses

With any luck, the governing board of Oregon's largest educational institution started a statewide trend Thursday when it moved forward toward a ban on the use of tobacco products on campus.

Congratulations, Portland Community College. Now let's see if the rest of the state's colleges and universities will show similarly good judgment.

PCC isn't the first in Oregon to embrace a tobacco-free campus. That honor goes to Oregon Coast Community College, which bans tobacco use on its campuses in Lincoln City and Waldport — a policy that will also apply to its Newport campus when it opens this fall.

But PCC is soon to become the second.

And given the school's size — nearly 90,000 students at three campuses and five training centers — its tobacco policy is destined to be influential.

PCC has long had a ban on smoking indoors. As it does almost everywhere, though, the ban led smokers to gather outside entryways to light up, forcing nonsmokers to run through clouds of secondhand smoke on their way in and out of campus buildings.

Eventually, PCC banned smoking outdoors near doors, windows and vents. Still, nonsmokers com-



Rock Creek and all other PCC campuses will be smoke-free.

plained of being exposed to secondhand smoke in parking lots, walkways and other areas on campus.

The move to ban all such tobacco use was led in part by Victoria Galanopoulos, student body president at PCC's Sylvania Campus in Southwest Portland. She developed a powerful ally in PCC President Preston Pulliams, who sees the wisdom of not trying to please everybody in the tobacco wars.

PCC is setting up the new policy in a way that seems sensitive to smokers. The ban won't take effect until September, a delay that gives smokers a

chance to quit and gives the campus time to change signs and promote smoking-cessation programs.

The American Lung Association, longtime foe of tobacco use, is understandably thrilled by PCC's student-led move. Now the association hopes to see a flurry of other Oregon colleges and universities muster the will to follow the Portland and coastal schools' good example.

The Oregon chapter of the American Lung Association is heavily promoting the potential trend. Andrew Epstein, a policy manager for the group, says some college officials express reluctance to ban tobacco for fear of losing students.

All the more reason for a statewide campus ban. Legislators, are you listening?

If not, they should listen to nursing student Rebecca Geary, who attends Mt. Hood Community College and wishes it would follow PCC's lead.

"I have seldom walked through the parking lots, or from one class to the next," she says, "without having to walk through at least one cloud of smoke."

Geary, a mother, grandmother and cancer survivor, is right. Her concern for her health should trump her fellow students' compulsion to light up on campus.

The Stump

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A precursor for Oregon?

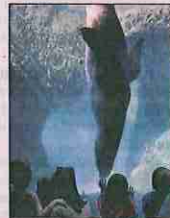
California politics sometimes foreshadow the way political winds will blow in Oregon, so you have to wonder what lessons lie in the budget package the California Legislature passed Thursday. Are the state's billions of dollars in new taxes and billions of dollars in cuts to schools and other services a preview of what's ahead for Oregon? Read and comment at The Stump.

Build the headquarters hotel

"For the last two years, Metro has been carefully investigating the feasibility of a visitor-funded, privately operated headquarters hotel adjacent to the Oregon Convention Center. During this tough economy, Portland and Oregon need this project more than ever. The 2,100 construction jobs, plus 800 permanent jobs created by the hotel, would bring a much-needed boost." Read and comment on Tom Chamberlain's views at The Stump.

Locked out

Zoos and aquariums around the country get 175 million visitors a year. They employ about 75,000 people and generate an economic impact of \$7.6 billion. So wasn't it a bit punitive, perhaps, not to mention an example of dinosaur thinking, to lock them out of the federal stimulus package? Voters generously supported the Oregon Zoo with a bond measure last fall, so it's not that the zoo expected or needed the federal money. Still, the specific exclusion of zoos and aquariums does seem shortsighted. Read and comment at The Stump.



Skip the sensationalism

"As a health curriculum specialist, I work to ensure that high school students develop the skills they need to make healthy decisions around their sexuality . . . leaving their health education class empowered with the tools to negotiate the difficulty of becoming a sexual being. Sensationalizing the use of condoms runs the risk of negating these important goals." Sydney York of Northeast Portland writes on the public blog My Oregon, located at The Stump.

The Oregonian

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