

The World

*From the Desk of
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Our View: School budget whining a test of patience

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The education funding bill approved by the state House and sent to the Senate this week seems to have not made anyone very happy.

The proposed \$7.3 billion budget for the next two years represents a 9 percent increase above previous funding. Democrats, who hold majorities in both houses, say it's the best balance at this point in the legislative session between funding for schools and all the other programs.

Educators say it's not enough. Of course, public school educators usually say that about any budget. But Republicans, usually the tightwads, talked like the Democrats had just decimated academia altogether.

"Today I think of our children, I think of the future of this great state. \$7.255 billion is not enough. I believe this is not adequate and that we can, and should, do better for our children." — Sen. Jackie Winters, R-Salem.

"House Democrats Pass Inadequate Funding Bill That Shortchanges Oregon Students, Teachers and Schools," blared the headline from an Oregon House Republicans press release.

Let's call this kind of talk for what it is, so much political rhetoric — on both sides.

First off, House Democrats passed a budget this early in the session — the earliest K-12 budget since at least 1991 — for bragging rights. They could've waited for more accurate revenue forecasts.

Republicans know good and well that the proposed budget includes provisions for increasing it when actual revenues become known later this session.

And educators are always asking to have some idea of what their revenues will be as early as possible because they are also in the midst of their budget processes. Now they have a good idea for the next two years — an overall 9 percent increase, with provisions for possible automatic increases. And they're complaining?

One could just chalk up all this verbiage to politics, but it's annoying. Hyperbole and fist-shaking obscures the fact that budgets are always stretched thinly between disparate needs — education, public health and safety, infrastructure, economic development.

The average citizen already understands the budget balancing act, at least from a kitchen table viewpoint. And families — unlike legislatures — usually are able to tackle their household budgets without the exaggerated angst and drama.