

Forrest Cooper

June 13, 2017

HB 2830

Dear Co-chairs Sen. Hass and Rep. Barnhart, and Esteemed Committee members,

Thank you for hearing testimony this evening about this crucial late-in-the-game revenue bill. I know the legislature has danced around this issue for the entire session, and I am pleased you have chosen to bring a proposal forward before adjournment sine die.

I have noticed a great variety of groups coming forward in support of this bill, including education, healthcare and other critical services. I am hopeful that a bipartisan bill can be finalized and approved.

As a veteran teacher, I have seen the long decline of public education in real terms over the past 25 years--especially in the past 10 years, as budgets did not keep up with costs and pension liabilities have continued to be punted down the road. I am hoping to give you, in this testimony, some ammunition to use in support of this measure, when opponents are arguing against it.

In my rural school district, we have survived by cutting out important staff infrastructure, as we have been shrinking to protect core programs. By recent estimates, under an \$8.2 billion budget a normal schedule at our middle school will result in some large core classes, as big as 37 in some cases. Several years ago we cut all media specialists in the district, and have been coasting since then. We have no vice principal and no instructional assistants other than special education at the middle school, no district nurse, no elementary counselors, no elementary music teacher, and no elementary PE teacher in our district. We have a partial shop program recently resurrected at the high school. Sadly, my children who graduated recently from my school district think this is what a normal education system looks like!

The point is, even a budget that appropriately taxes larger businesses and delivers an extra \$890 million in this biennium will not result in putting together all the missing pieces, much less investing in new programs. When opponents say that we should not raise taxes on the untaxed corporations in our state, we can clearly say that this represents a compromise--the state has a constitutional obligation to educate our kids, and our divestment in education has put Oregon on the margins of that requirement.

The bridge concept in this bill is a solid and creative step towards real revenue reform, as opposed to another band-aid solution to a systemic problem. Oregonians are ready for a change, and we are counting on this Legislature to act.

Thank you for your consideration.

Forrest Cooper

Teacher