

## **2009 Legislative Session**

February 2009

The 2009 Oregon legislature convened on January 12 and the revenue news is tough. The legislature is trying to cope with the loss of hundreds of millions of dollars in the current budget and much more in the 2009-2011 budget. Education, human services and public safety make up the bulk of the state budget and each faces cuts in both budget cycles.

Governor Kulongoski has stated education and children are his priorities but the difficult economic times are hurting many Oregonians and the State is experiencing the same type of challenges due to lost jobs, lost income and lost value in real-estate. So at the critical time when state services are in greater demand, the money is tight.

In addition to dealing with the budget issues of Oregon, the legislature is looking at policy concerns:

- full day kindergarten, and protecting tuition based full day Kindergarten until revenue for state wide full day Kindergarten is found;
- tougher laws and reporting requirements on the issues of educator discipline;
- extending health care to more vulnerable children and youth;
- proposals to specify who and how students enroll in virtual schools;
- requiring school based comprehensive eyesight exams for all students;
- adopting best practices to help autistic children and their families;
- evaluation of charter school processes;
- accountability of schools and districts and quality improvement for teachers, administrators and other staff;
- funding for K-12, higher education and community colleges;
- voucher style programs for “school choice”;
- evaluation of the ballot measure rules and laws;
- comprehensive evaluation of infrastructure needs for schools and transportation;
- revenue discussions from increasing the corporate minimum income tax to fees and taxes on beer and cigarettes or revising the “kicker”.

Thousands of bills are filed each session and many don't make it past the preliminary stages. Policy bills and dealing with building a balanced budget are the focus of the legislative session.

School districts across the state are considering their options if the next series of state tax revenue forecasts are still weak. Some districts are considering cuts that include loss of jobs and programs and perhaps school days in the current year. All is dependent on the forecast and possible federal stimulus program.

With the support of our many education partners Oregon PTA will continue to advocate for what is best for all Oregon students and schools. We will work hard to protect the fragile progress we helped make last session. Oregon PTA and National PTA will need your help. As legislative session proceeds we will ask for your assistance.