

**Salem-News.com (Feb-17-2009 09:13)**

## **Crowd documented at more than 5,000 in noon-time Rally at State Capitol**

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**They call on the Legislature to invest wisely, tap reserves, and raise revenue to protect kids & education with the federal economic stimulus package providing a smaller-than-hoped for investment in Oregon schools.**

Courtesy: Stand for Children

(SALEM, Ore.) - More than 5,000 citizens spent their President's Day holiday traveling by busload and carpool to Salem with a simple message for the Legislature: Protect kids and schools.



"With an \$800 million shortfall in the current budget and a \$2.2 billion gap in the next biennium, we know there are no easy answers," said Holly Pruett, Stand for Children's Oregon Executive Director.

"More than 5,000 Oregonians came to the State Capitol today to support the legislature in making the tough political decisions needed to protect Oregon's kids and schools."

A large noon-time Rally organized by Stand for Children is calling on the Legislature to prevent harmful cuts to education and other critical children's services:

Invest what we have wisely, funding programs that produce the best results

Smartly utilize reserves and the federal stimulus \* coming to Oregon

Responsibly raise revenue, and change the way Oregon forecasts revenue to end the boom-and-bust cycle Pruett said that on-site registration cards indicated over 5,000 had attended the rally. More than 60 buses brought adults and children from the coast and throughout the Willamette Valley.

\* Education-related support to Oregon in the federal stimulus package includes for K-12, up to \$466 million (part of direct aid to states); College Pell grants: \$196 million; Special education: \$135 million; Title I: \$137 million; Head Start: \$7 - \$17 million.

### Rally Highlights

Speaker of the House Dave Hunt, Senate President Peter Courtney and House Majority Leader Mary Noland spoke on behalf of dozens of legislators who were introduced at the Rally, thanking the crowd for showing its support for the difficult decisions ahead.

Hillsboro High School seniors Davis Sam and Kyle Carnes recalled the budget cuts six years ago that focused national attention (and a Doonesbury series) on Hillsboro having the shortest school year in the nation.

"Why are we here again, Oregon? What happened to the lessons we were

supposed to have learned?" Davis Sam asked.

Kyle Carnes warned, "Under-funding education creates an abandoned generation unprepared to live the great American dream. Remember this Oregon: It is no longer just about the money, it is our very future that is at stake."

Jonah Edelman, Stand for Children founder and CEO, a father of twin 3-year old boys, called for focusing on state investments with a strong return.

"Let's be very clear about something today: making schools work for all children is about how much we invest in our schools and about spending that money wisely. We're here to support our legislators in asking the tough questions and making the tough decisions to ensure tax dollars go to the programs that really work."

Edelman cited three examples programs with a high return on investment:

(1) Providing a mentor to every new teacher and principal, which research proves enables the largely low-income students taught by new teachers to make the same achievement gains as students taught by veteran teachers and returns \$1.66 for every dollar invested by reducing teacher turn-over.

(2) Funding health insurance for the 116,000 Oregon children who have none, which will bring millions of federal matching dollars to the state and reduce emergency room spending.

(3) Funding quality pre-K: research indicates that every dollar spent on pre-school saves \$7 dollars in future social service and criminal justice spending. Tom Olson, Canby grandparent of 12, great-grandparent of 14, retired after 45 years as a teacher & administrator, underscored the need for revenue reforms.

"In times like these, we can't and we won't allow education to be pitted health care, children to be pitted against seniors or other vulnerable Oregonians. There are things that are broken about our revenue system and NOW is the time to fix them!"

Olson said the state needs to change the way it budgets to save more during good times to protect kids and schools in bad times; to increase the contributions from corporations (individual taxpayers contribute 90% of the cost of schools, public safety and health care while most large corporations pay only the \$10 minimum, which hasn't changed in over 70 years); and to eliminate tax break giveaways that serve no broad public purpose.

He pointed out that Oregon taxes on beer and wine haven't gone up in decades, and the tobacco lobby spends millions every year to avoid tax increases. Erica Wherry, a social studies teacher at Forest Grove High School, spoke of the benefit she's received as a new teacher from a mentorship program now funded in her district by the state – an example of the kind of cost-effective investment promoted by the rally.

"Thanks to the mentoring I'm getting, I'm quickly becoming the great teacher I've always wanted to be, and my students are getting the quality of instruction they need and deserve." Wherry said she almost left the profession after her first year – one-third of new teachers quit within their first three years, at a cost of \$45 million per year to Oregon taxpayers.

Barbara Casey, a child welfare worker from Portland who helps abused and neglected kids find foster parents, spoke of the importance of schools and human services to the struggling state economy.

"Cuts to basic human services will hurt Oregonians and leave behind millions in federal matching funds. Investing in education and human services is an investment in good jobs, stronger communities, and a stronger economy."

Kristin Trone, an Oregon City High School senior, closed the rally with a call to stay involved. "Students need you to keep speaking up, reaching out, and showing up, to make sure we turn a corner in this state and provide public schools and strong community services that help students make it."

Jennifer Geller emceed the rally. Geller is a Stand for Children Lane County Chapter parent leader and candidate for school board in Eugene. Bobbie Regan, a Portland school board member, led an opening cheer with North Clackamas students.

Musical performances by Milwaukie High School Band and Salem's Walker Middle School Winter Ensemble warmed up the crowd.

The Rally was endorsed by: American Federation of Teachers—Oregon, Children First for Oregon, Confederation of OR School Administrators, Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon, Juvenile Rights Project, Onward Oregon, Oregon Bus Project, Oregon Business Association, Oregon Education Association, Oregon Head Start Association, Oregon School Employees Association, Our Oregon, Partnership for Safety & Justice, Rural Organizing Project, Service Employees International Union (SEIU), Tax Fairness Oregon. Before and after the Rally, hundreds of Stand for Children members met with their legislators to encourage them to back accountable investments in Oregon's classroom, increased teacher and principal quality, and support for early learners. Details at [stand.org/or/legislative](http://stand.org/or/legislative).

Source: Stand for Children

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