

A Back-to-School 'Thank You' to the Oregon Legislature

Remember that bumper sticker about school funding and Pentagon bombers from the '60s and '70s?

"It will be a great day when schools have all the money they need and the Pentagon has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber."

That "great day" may not be quite here – but, thanks to the 2007 Oregon Legislative session, we're getting closer.

Our state senators and representatives approved a K-12 budget of \$6.245 billion for the 2007-08 biennium. That's almost a billion dollars more than was earmarked for schools by the 2005 Legislature. You can read more about this victory for kids in our Viewpoint column on page 38.



A couple of friends and I - with kids in tow - attend a school funding rally in 1996.

It's been a long road to this point. Thousands of concerned citizens have spent countless hours organizing, advocating, canvassing and phone-banking over the past decade – and longer. I remember dragging my preschooler and kindergartner to school

funding rallies in the mid-'90s. At one rally at Pioneer Courthouse Square, we listened as an articulate teenager spoke to the crowd. I'm paraphrasing what he said that day, but it went something like this, "It's a beautiful spring day. I should be out soaking up the sun or chasing girls. Instead I'm here begging for enough money for the schools." The crowd roared its approval.

That young man really hit the nail on the head. It's always seemed to me the most bizarre, Twilight Zone-type paradox that residents of the richest country in the world should have to – year after year – beg, plead, march, rally and fight for merely adequate school funding. That's just nuts. Like the wise-beyond-his-years teen pointed out at the rally, we should be off attending to the normal stuff of life – taking care of our families, hanging out with the kids, coaching soccer and baseball teams. Chasing girls if we're high school boys.

Maybe we'll be able to do more of that stuff now.

That's not to say that there aren't plenty of other important causes that demand our attention. Work is needed to help pass The Healthy Kids Plan – which will be on the November ballot – to guarantee health insurance for Oregon's neediest children. There's a war in the Middle East that many of us feel should never have been started. And almost a billion men, women and children around the planet still go to bed hungry every night. Plenty, it would seem, to keep us busy.

But it feels sooo good to know that basic K-12 school funding can be crossed off the list (for the time being).

Thanks to all of those legislators who made our kids a priority this legislative session!



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