

PTA takes action in Washington DC, Oregon PTA at Capitol Hill

In March, Oregon PTA joined PTA leaders from across the nation and from as far away as Europe to bring our issues to Congress. Sandy Bell, president elect of Oregon PTA, Becky Swayzee Latino Outreach Coordinator from Hillsboro and Otto Schell, legislative director Oregon PTA were with hundreds of PTA advocates in Washington DC.

Our issues:

- Keep federal financial support strong for public schools in these tough economic times, preventing teacher layoffs and program cuts.
- Increase funding for parent involvement support, in particular support Parent Information Resource Centers, PIRCs and help expand these resources to all schools.
- Press hard to keep meaningful parent involvement as a priority for all schools and support efforts for strong two way communication with parents and families. In the event of No Child Left Behind being renewed, a “growth model” and better measures of student and school success should be included.

Oregon’s Senators, Representatives and their staff were very helpful and interested in the PTA issues. They would welcome your input on issues ranging from school quality, reconsideration of the NCLB law and how federal stimulus or recovery dollars are being used in their districts.

News from the State Capitol

The budget for the 2007-09 has been rebalanced. Oregon PTA and our partners were part of the human services, public safety and education coalition which worked to have additional federal stimulus dollars spent in the 07-09 budget. We testified to a series of Ways and Means subcommittees and met with individual legislators. The legislature responded with additional money for schools. Another revenue forecast awaits us in May and additional cuts and/or a need to spend federal stimulus dollars will likely be required.

In addition to the budget rebalance, bills to prohibit private employee discipline agreements have moved forward. Hearings on full day kindergarten produced a bill that encourages districts to include full day kindergarten but does not prohibit tuition based full day K programs during this financially fragile time.

Other issues facing the legislature deal with the quality and control of on line “virtual schools” and charter schools. Consolidation of Oregon Education Service Districts (ESDs) is being considered. ESDs provide many support services to the school districts in their areas. A bill expanding protection for kids from bullying and to provide clear responses to those concerns has passed the House and will move to the Senate. Bills for physical activity, pest control management in schools, revised ethics rules and addressing initiative petitions have all moved forward.

State budget impacts local services

Now the work begins on how to fund basic services and schools when a cut of as much as 30% of existing budgets is being forced by loss of income tax revenue in the current economic tough times. The Governor and legislators will wrestle with cuts to important programs and what options there may be for raising revenue.

Critical decisions are being made in your school districts about budgets; contact your district offices to weigh in on priorities. Districts should invite public input and will conduct public meetings. Use your voices to make sure your priorities are included.

Voice your state budget concerns

Legislative leadership is discussing a “road show” that is a series of public hearings around Oregon to hear Oregonians’ opinions on the budget.

Join us in Salem (see below) and/or be in touch with your legislators. Use Oregon PTA’s capwiz links to find your representatives <http://capwiz.com/npta2/or/home/>

I also urge you to sign up for your legislators’ email newsletters, you will be up to date on the issues and know your legislators’ position.