

APR 25 2007

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790 3 The H&N view

Bills would help public knowledge of school issues

They limit use of privilege, require financial reviews

Two measures are working their way through the Oregon Legislature that would give the public more awareness of how public funds are spent. Both have statewide impact, but one of them, S. B. 671, got its start in the Klamath Falls in the fallout of the Bert Teamey case.

Teamey is a retired Klamath Falls dentist who fought for years to get the results of an investigation of allegations of mismanagement within the Klamath County School District. He failed when courts supported the school district's contention that the documents were covered by attorney-client privilege.

The public may yet get a victory of sorts. The issue resulted in an effort by the Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association to pass a state law that would deny use of attorney-client privilege when records are compiled for a public body and doesn't include legal advice or opinions from the attorney or someone working for the attorney.

It sailed through the Oregon State Senate on a 26-1 vote and is now in the Oregon House where it deserves an equally warm treatment.

The other bill, H.B. 2613, appears to be struggling and remains in the Oregon House of Representatives Committee on Education. It was introduced Feb. 6, and has had two hearings.

The bill requires that once every six years school districts must undergo an analysis of a district's financial management. Those found to meet criteria set by the State Board of Education will go another six years before being evaluated again.

Districts that don't meet standards will have to appoint an 11-member financial management advisory committee, weighted

strongly towards public participation. That committee would conduct another analysis and work with the district on improvements.

The agenda's big

The assessment program that comes from the state would be aimed at improving financial management practices, explore the use of a district's resources, identify potential cost savings, "increase public confidence in and support of districts that demonstrate efficient use of tax revenues, and link financial planning and budget to student performance and other district priorities."

That's a big agenda. But the cost of implementation estimated at \$2 million for the first two years, are likely to look pretty pale compared to the potential savings and efficiency increases that could result in an improved education for the students.

The measure is being pushed by the Chalkboard Project, an organization funded by several foundations looking for ways to improve Oregon education without breaking the bank. Through its Web site, chalkboardproject.org, the organization has already increased understanding of local school budgets by giving capsule summaries of local spending along with other information.

H.B. 2613 would increase assurance to taxpayers that their money is well-spent, and that children are getting the best education they can.

Both of the measures would increase the public's knowledge of its public bodies and deserve approval.

Editorial board

Pat Bushey wrote today's editorial, which represents the view of the Herald and News editorial board. Its members include:

- Publisher Heidi Wright.
- Editor Steve Miller.
- Day Editor Marcia McGonigle.
- Opinion Editor Pat Bushey.

■ In addition, members of the public sit in on editorial board meetings as community advisers. Currently, the community members, who stay on for about six months, are Russ McMahon and Steve Souder.

Bushey writes most of the editorials.