

Does our state government create fiscal cruelty?

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By Rep. Matt Wingard (R-Wilsonville)

Oregon's ruling elite claim to care about the health and well-being of all citizens. Yet, past mismanagement of our state's finances and the Governor's 2009-11 budget are the cruel products of dysfunctional and manipulative non-leadership in our state's capitol.

The state government has nearly \$1 billion more in revenue than in the previous two-year budget, and state revenues are currently on pace to increase by 7 percent. The Legislature's top revenue analyst recently told me that over the long term Oregon State revenues grow by an annual average of 6 to 6.5 percent.

Despite our increasing revenue, analysts estimate the state is \$1.4 billion short to maintain programs at current levels. While the governor proposes increased spending and higher taxes, he calls for painful cuts to programs important for low-income senior citizens and other vulnerable Oregonians.

The Governor's budget illustrates state politics at its very worst. If the Legislature adopts this fiscal blueprint, it will continue to reward special interests while punishing those who depend on vital services to survive. Seniors will lose in-home care, while large donors to Democrats are being spared the worst of the cuts. Those who "pay to play" are the biggest winners.

It didn't have to be this way. In 2007, the state had \$2.7 billion in new revenue, a 20-percent increase over the previous two-year budget. The Legislature passed on the opportunity to fund vital government programs with a reasonable 12 to 13 percent increase, setting the rest aside for a possible economic downturn. Had they done that, neither horrible service cuts nor tax and fee increases would be necessary in the next state budget.

Instead, the last Legislature spent all the revenue and still raised taxes and fees by over \$620 million. The Legislature pretended to create a Rainy Day Fund, filling it by raising taxes on businesses. However, by the time our current budget period ends in June it is likely there will be no money left in the Rainy Day Fund.

The Democrat majority squandered billions of your tax dollars on pet projects, pork-barrel spending to benefit their districts and big-money contributors. As one example, the Legislature spent \$7 million on a downtown Hillsboro parking garage that could have been funded by the city and private businesses. Considering these "bridges to nowhere" in the current budget it's no surprise the state is spending our Rainy Day Fund.

Responsible leadership is long overdue. Next month I begin my first regular session as your State Representative. I'm working hard to create a government that lives within its means and makes the same hard choices that families and businesses face every day.

The Legislature must abandon pet projects, protect vital human services and public safety programs, and commit to living on 6 percent annual budget increases. During good economic times the state must set aside revenue to help out when things get rough.

The alternative is continuation of the corrupt system of "pay to play" and the cruelty of holding our most vulnerable citizens hostage to generate voter support for tax increases.

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