

Oregon Republicans: K-12 school funding too low a priority

From KTVZ.COM news sources

SALEM, Ore. -

Last week, the nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Office released a report revealing the 2015-2017 Democrat-approved budget only dedicated 10.4 percent of Oregon's all funds biannual budget to K-12 education, Rep. Tim Knopp, R-Bend, and other Republican lawmakers lamented.



Despite a 7.3 percent increase in the total budget over the last biennium and claims by Democrats that funding education is their top priority, the Senate Republicans said in a news release that "this new report shows education spending falls far below other priorities like administrative costs and retirement benefits for state employees."

"Responsible Oregon families sit down, review their budget, and allocate their resources according to their priorities," Knopp said. "They meet their basic needs first. For too long, Democrats in Oregon have not followed the sound budgeting principles that Oregon taxpayers expect. If we're only willing to spend one tenth of our budget on K-12 education, how can our children get a quality education that prepares them to support their family in the future?"

In contrast to the 10.4% of total funds allocated to K-12 education in the 2015-2017 budget, 44% was allocated to Human Services and 16.6% to administrative costs. This is in large part due to bloated agency budgets, Knopp and GOP colleagues said, leaving less funds available for K-12 education and other critical services like public safety.

"Democrats have misled Oregonians for too long, deprioritizing K-12 education in order to spend more on agency salaries and retirement benefits for public employees," said Senate Republican Leader Ted Ferrioli (R-John Day). "It's time Oregonians demand Democrats start living up to their promise to put education first by fully funding K-12 education."

In Oregon, the State School Fund comes from General and Lottery Funds, also known as "discretionary funds." Since the 2003-05 budget, Democrats have reduced the overall share of discretionary funds going to K-12 education by 6 percent.

The share of "other funds" in Oregon's budget is over 40 percent, which the Republicans said Democrats have used to protect funding for pet priorities by adding numerous fees.

Also, they said, one third of those "other funds" currently go to pay PERS liabilities, which Democrats have failed to address in recent legislative sessions. Other non-discretionary funds include federal funds tied to specific programs, such as the recent expansion of Obamacare that will see a 10 percent drop in federal support from 2017 to 2020.

"It doesn't matter how you crunch the numbers: Just over 10 percent of Oregon's total budget is not enough to provide our kids with a quality education," Knopp said.

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