

Legislature must significantly increase investment in public education

by Pete Sorenson, Lane County Com

In a Dec. 29, '06 editorial, The Oregonian urges Oregon legislators to listen to Kirby Dyess, vice chair of the Oregon State Board of Higher Education, as he explains how investment in higher education brought prosperity to Ireland. ("The Celtic Tiger") Entitled, "A first step for a future 'Northwest Tiger,'" the editorial advocates increased investment in Oregon's colleges and universities. Wise advice -- but it doesn't go far enough.

Pete Sorenson, Lane County Commissioner During the past six years, community college tuition has nearly doubled. In 1999-2001, the average cost to attend an Oregon community college was \$1,700. By 2005-2007, that cost was up to \$3,000. In practical terms, if a college student worked at a minimum wage job to pay for school, by 2002 he would have to work for 55 hours a week, leaving virtually no time to study. We need to bring tuition costs down, so workers can afford education.

When I was a member of the Oregon State Senate Education Committee, we contemplated starting a commission to figure out what a quality education in Oregon would cost. Later, the legislature created the Oregon Quality Education Commission. The commission has concluded that we have a gap in excess of \$1 billion between the cost of a quality education and the amount that Oregon currently provides.

In 2002, Commission Chair Kenneth Thrasher asked, "Have the reasonable goals of a quality education become a broken promise?" In 2007 it's time to restore that promise. I hope that this year the Oregon legislature will significantly increase investment in public education at all levels.

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