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Governor Kulongoski recommends major changes to education, pensions

Kulongoski discusses how to reshape government in era of declining revenues

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Education

Gov. Ted Kulongoski's Reset Cabinet today recommended major changes to Oregon's education system, from preschool through college.

The recommendations, however, drew a lukewarm reaction from education leaders.

"It's a rehash of a lot of old ideas that have been tested in the Legislature and either didn't make it or have been successful and are underway," said Chuck Bennett, director of government relations for the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators.

Video: <http://www.statesmanjournal.com/live>">Watch a replay of Gov. Kulongoski's speech at the Portland City Club

Read the report: <http://www.statesmanjournal.com/assets/pdf/J0160072625.PDF>">Reset Cabinet's recommendations

Speech: <http://www.statesmanjournal.com/assets/pdf/J0160074625.PDF>"> Read Gov. Kulongoski's speech as prepared for delivery.

Website: http://governor.oregon.gov/Gov/governor_reset_cabinet/reset_state_govt.shtml">Governor Kulongoski's Reset Cabinet website

Among the proposals:

- Cut funding for the Oregon University System by 15 percent in the upcoming budget. In return, universities would be given more flexibility to manage revenue and costs, including converting from line-item to block grant funding from the state.
- Reform the Oregon Opportunity Grant program, which helps low-income students afford college, to prevent over-commitments.
- Legislatively mandate that school districts share some functions through education service districts by July 1, 2012; and reorganize the current education service district system by July 1, 2014.
- Create and support a statewide public virtual learning system, and require every district to provide access to it if the district does not have its own option.
- Align teacher evaluations with student performance.
- Embrace charter schools.
- Make the state Superintendent of Public Instruction a position appointed by the governor, rather than elected by voters.

- Expand options for high school students to earn college credits.

- Allow state intervention in Oregon's five lowest-performing schools.

"We must end our practice of evaluating the success of our education system based solely on how much money it receives," Kulongoski said. "We must stop claiming political victories based on a budget number. Money is not an outcome — it's a means to achieve that outcome."

Prisons

Gov. Ted Kulongoski today called for modifying Measure 11, Oregon's strict voter-approved sentencing system for violent offenders.

He also called for a continuing freeze on implementation of Measure 57, a voter-approved ballot measure that imposed tougher sentences on property offenders.

Those two proposals are contained in a package of cost-cutting public safety measures recommended by the governor. They are designed to cut prison spending in response to current and long-term state budget woes.

Another money-saving proposal put forward by the governor calls for Oregon to adopt the federal prison system's granting of 15 percent earned time sentence reductions for all prison inmates, except those serving life sentences.

Labor

State workers should begin sharing the costs of their pension and health care benefits, Gov. Ted Kulongoski said Friday as part of his "Reset Cabinet" speech in Portland today.

Workers should begin paying the 6 percent employee contribution to PERS, Kulongoski said. State agencies currently pick up that contribution.

Workers also should begin sharing the cost of their health care, he said. They should begin to pay part of their insurance premiums, and have deductibles and higher copays instituted into their health plans.

"I think it is fair to ask state employees and school employees to share the burden of bringing these costs under control," Kulongoski said.
