

Mannix: Tax overhaul would be premature now

SALEM (AP) — Despite the state's current budget squeeze, it's premature to say Oregon's tax system needs to be overhauled to provide more money for programs, gubernatorial candidate Kevin Mannix said Friday.

Speaking to a group of child advocates, Mannix also said the continuing squabbling in Salem over the state's \$482 million deficit has left many Oregonians disdainful of the state's political leadership. 5048

"We have to overcome a great deal of cynicism among voters as they watch what's being played out right now in the Legislature and the posturing that occurs," the Salem Republican said.

His comments came at a forum sponsored by Children First for Oregon, a children's advocacy network, which a day earlier heard a presentation from Democratic gubernatorial contender Ted Kulongoski.

Kulongoski said that more revenue is needed to support state services, and that he would look to voters and grassroots activists to lead the charge for any tax overhaul referrals.

Mannix, a former House member who ran for attorney general in 2000, said the state shouldn't seek long-term changes in its tax system simply as a response to short-term problems brought on by the recession.

"What I've said to folks is that the tax structure as it exists right now can fund the programs that we need if we use plain thinking about priorities," he said.

Mannix said that as governor he would place top priority on programs involving public safety, education, seniors, persons with disabilities and young children.

"There are a lot of other



AP photo/Don Ryan

Oregon Republican gubernatorial candidate Kevin Mannix addresses a group of children's advocates in Salem Friday.

things that government does that are nice, but they are not as important as those priorities," he said.

At the same time, Mannix said that he believes the state eventually will want to take a new look at its tax system, but that review should be done "in a positive environment," not while the state is struggling through a recession.

"By that I mean a situation where people feel comfortable that they've got a governor who's not just going around and saying, 'Let's raise taxes.'"

Mannix was referring to Democratic Gov. John Kitzhaber, who throughout the year has been urging legislators to approve an income tax increase as a way to offset falling revenue.

"I'm saying there are still some cookies left in the cookie jar we can use to avoid cuts, but he wants a whole other jar full of cookies," Mannix said in an interview after Friday's forum.