

Panelists say gasoline shortage worsening

Legislators meet citizens over fuel crunch

By DANA TIMS
Of the Emerald

SALEM — The Senate Transportation Committee looked like a rerun of "Industry on Parade" Wednesday when 19 representatives of various fuel-dependent fields discussed the current gasoline and diesel supply situation in Oregon.



The all-male panel, jammed into the front of Hearing Room A, included gas station owners, fishers, grain growers, truckers, tourism and chamber of commerce representatives and a district manager for Shell Oil. Only blaring theme music and opening credits were missing.

Although panelists disagreed on some specific points, they agreed that the shortage is real, that it's going to get worse and that industry shouldn't be stuck with having to make most of the sacrifices.

"I'm out in the trenches everyday," said Phil Webb, a gasoline station owner from Salem. "Right now we're beginning to prepare the public for the end, because it will come."

Webb criticized federal regulations that prohibit serving preferred customers and accused the state of doing nothing to solve the current problems.

"Everyone seems to be walking down a dark, lonely street, whistling and looking in all directions," Webb said. "And they're just waiting for the bomb to go off."

Kill clause questioned by SUAB

The Student University Affairs Board will ask University Pres. William Boyd to decide whether it should withdraw a motion that requests review of the University's "kill clause."

The clause, which was approved by Assembly faculty members in creating the student positions, permits the governing body to vote out student members.

At its Wednesday meeting, the board discussed withdrawing the motion because it might be out of order. SUAB chairer Gary McMahon said he would ask Boyd if the motion is appropriate.

In other business, the board nominated five of its members for next year's chairer and vice chairer positions.

Nominated for chairer were sociology representative Carrie Winegar, education representative Jesse Barton, psychology representative Mike Haddock and law representative Mike Johnston.

Nominated for vice chairer were liberal arts representative ElRay Cook, Winegar and Barton.

The board will vote next week on the positions.

From a behind-the-pump perspective, Webb likened non-regular customers to locusts, saying, "They just swarm in and take all of your gas when you might need it for long-established commercial customers."

N.P. Staropoli, district manager for Shell Oil, appeared more relaxed. "There's no question there is a shortage and that everyone is going to have to share that burden," he said. "But if consumers, which we all are, stay calm, we can work our way out of it."

He added that Oregon's gasoline allocation currently is about 85 percent of what it was last year at this time.

Sen. L.B. Day, R-Salem, committee member, asked what action the state can take to ease the fuel crunch.

"Well, aren't there some state and federal lands in eastern Oregon that could be turned over for oil drilling?" responded Carl Leathers, president of the Oregon Oil Jobbers Association.

Day noted that "past indiscretions" by oil companies in Oregon resulted in a ban on most exploration, particularly off the coast. He then alluded to a recent comment by Pres. Carter that indicated enough oil is being pumped but most of it is being used to produce diesel instead of gasoline.

Day pressed a favorite point of his by asking Staropoli if Shell would build a refinery to produce gasohol — a mixture of 90 percent gasoline and 10 percent alcohol or methanol — if it would help solve the gasoline shortage.

"That involves tremendous cost," Staropoli answered. He ticked off, with ease, eight quick reasons why the project might not be feasible.

"You know," interjected committee chairer Del Isham, D-Lincoln City, "there used to be such a thing as market incentive, where businesses would undertake new projects trying to make a profit."

"That's right," Staropoli said,

"if there's enough money in it, someone will do it."

"Maybe the state could offer tax breaks or credits to ensure that incentive," he said, addressing Staropoli, "but if we're talking about everyone contributing something, and a gasohol refinery is something you could do, why the hell aren't you doing it?"

"Oil and gasoline are what we know best," Staropoli answered. "And if those state and federal lands were available for drilling we wouldn't even be talking about gasohol."

After four hours of such exchanges, both sides ran out of gas and the meeting was adjourned.



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