

...Baird frowns on LNG terminals on Columbia River

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its use would increase the cost of the overall project by 25 percent.

The Bush Administration has interpreted the law in a "convoluted way," Baird said, that encourages the Federal Highway Administration to break up projects into smaller "sub-contracts" and then apply the 25 percent rule to each sub-contract.

"Congress funds a project from start to finish. That's the project," Baird said. "It's just common sense that U.S. tax dollars should be spent on U.S. goods used in U.S. infrastructure projects."

He said the decline of the U.S. steel industry also has important national security implications.

"What would happen to our infrastructure in the event of a deadly earthquake?" he asked. "Rebuilding efforts would be made that much more difficult if there were no domestic

steel industry to rely on."

Baird said he aggressively defended the Davis-Bacon Act (the federal prevailing wage law) and union workers when Republicans tried to strip it from the Water Resource Development Act. The Water Resource bill authorizes the secretary of the Army to construct various projects for improvements to rivers and harbors.

Baird said he also stood up to the Bush Administration when it tried to strip funding for Perkins Grant funds earmarked for vocational education training at high schools and community colleges. "These funds are a great help for blue-collar workers," he said.

The House recently passed a bill that Baird introduced that will bolster math and science education by bringing academia and industry together.

"This isn't just for educating kids for college," Baird said. "There is language in the bill that will help with

vocational and technical education that will increase job opportunities."

Job opportunities was the issue with building trades unions after Baird announced his opposition to a proposed liquid natural gas(LNG) terminal at Bradwood Landing near Astoria, Oregon.

Baird says the criticism is unwarranted because no one from labor ever contacted him to state their interest or position in the project. He said he was aware that construction unions supported the terminal after seeing John Mohlis, executive secretary-treasurer of the Columbia-Pacific Building Trades Council, testify on behalf of the Bradwood terminal at a public forum in Cathlamet, Wash.

Union officials say Baird didn't give them an opportunity to make

their case before announcing his opposition.

Baird told the Labor Press he isn't opposed to liquid natural gas terminals in general, but he's unlikely to support any terminals proposed along the Columbia River. In addition to Bradwood Landing, there are three other LNG terminals proposed for the lower Columbia River and another in Coos Bay.

"Our nation needs liquid natural gas and the terminals need to be built and operated by union labor," Baird said. "But there are other issues to consider." He said river safety, private property rights, and impacts on shipping lanes and sports fishing due to security measures are important issues that need to be addressed.

Temporary construction jobs are

important, he said. But the long-term impact on people's lives carries more weight.

On the issue of health care reform, Baird is a recent co-sponsor of the Healthy Americans Act, a bill introduced by Oregon Democratic U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden. The bill — supported by the Service Employees International Union and several corporations — would maintain the current health care system, but would require employers to pay for a portion of their employees' premiums.

In a press release, Wyden and Baird said the reform package is centered on a market-based health care system, universal coverage with individual responsibility, financial assistance for low-income individuals; healthier behavior and incentives; and

On second try, Oregon House passes bill that adds safety to bargaining

SALEM — A bill to restore the ability of firefighters, police and corrections officers to discuss safety equipment and staffing levels during contract negotiations was resurrected May 8 by Democrats who control the Oregon House of Representatives.

Senate Bill 400-C, a top priority bill of the Oregon AFL-CIO, passed 44-14. A month ago the bill was defeated by a single vote in the House. Then, only one Republican voted in favor, and only one Democrat voted against it.

In a parliamentary maneuver, Democrat Jeff Barker, a retired police officer and police union official, changed his "yes" vote to a "no" so that he could bring the bill back for reconsideration. Only those on the prevailing side of a vote can request such action.

Prior to the House vote, SB 400

passed in the Democratic-controlled Senate 16-13. In that chamber, two Democrats and an independent voting with all the Republicans in opposition.

Because the bill was amended, it now must go back to the Senate for concurrence. Union officials expect it to pass.

Previous to a change in the law in 1995 by a Republican-controlled Legislature, employees were allowed to negotiate on issues related to safety.

Police and fire bureaus and many city and local municipalities opposed SB 400, arguing that they can't afford to hire more manpower. The amended bill says unions must show a "significant impact" to safety in order to make it a topic for bargaining. The defeated version of the bill used the word "substantial impact."

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