

Guest Opinion

By Ed Barnes and Robert Schaefer



Lawmakers must work together on I-5 Bridge replacement

It is important that legislators and elected officials work together to develop laws that lead to projects that will be beneficial to the people they represent.

Our Southwest Washington delegation has been divided on how to approach the replacement of the I-5 Bridge. They realize that when the 192nd interchange was approved by the Legislature, it was a project of statewide significance. This interchange played an important part in the development of the semi-conductor industry, businesses, and other industries in Clark County, as would the replacement of the I-5 Bridge. The bill last session was watered down to put greater emphasis on studying other bridges and crossings on the Columbia River that will be needed in the future, but not before first dealing with the replacement of the I-5 Bridge.

Everyone recognizes that tolls will be required in the future and we cannot let the issue of tolls affect the replacement of the I-5 Bridge. The Departments of Transportation of both Oregon and Washington will be the ones that resolve the toll issues. We all need to be working together to develop a project that has statewide and national significance. The original proposal of the CRC had both states agreeing. It is important that we accept the agreements we had by expediting the replacement of the I-5 Bridge.

The Washington Legislature and the governor this session are facing the most critical transportation and economic decision of all time. These decisions will impact not only the states of Washington and Oregon, but the whole West Coast for many years to come. They can either spend all of this session rehashing and debating all of the same issues that Washington and Oregon debated for the past 10 or more years at a cost of \$200 million, or they can agree on a compromise package that is similar to what was agreed on by both states, passed by the Oregon Legislature and approved by the Oregon governor, and then was passed by the Washington State House of Representatives, but died in the Washington State Senate Transportation Committee.

Gov. Jay Inslee can, by executive request to the Legislature, recommend legislation in a bill that will capitalize on the \$200 million spent earlier on permitting and engineering. This legislation must be commensurate with what Oregon and Washington had agreed to. We could then have a shovel-ready project in the near future.

If the Feds come up with funding for infrastructure, the replacement of the I-5 Bridge would be able to compete for those federal funds. We need not forget that three past presidents have placed the replacement of the I-5 Bridge, which is part of the Federal Defense Interstate System, as having a very high-priority for projects that the Federal government should be supporting.

Some real community input and legislative and executive leadership are needed now to avoid a costly disastrous nightmare for not only the states of Washington and Oregon, but the whole West Coast for many years to come.

Vancouver resident Ed Barnes is 2nd vice president of the Northwest Oregon Labor Council and a retired business manager of IBEW Local 48. Robert Schaefer is a former Washington state representative from the 49th District and a community activist.

... 'Anti-union' organizers

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been registered as member-based non-profits, a holdover from the days before they won legal collective bargaining rights. Under state law, that meant any member could request a complete member list. Freedom Foundation found anti-union members willing to do that, and requested lists. Local 503 asked members to vote to change its legal charter, which they overwhelmingly approved. Oregon AFSCME is doing the same.

"Is it the public's right to know where a public employee lives? I don't think so," says Oregon AFSCME spokesperson Ross Grami. "Even though they're a public employee, that seems like an unreasonable amount of information to have to give."

Luckily for the labor movement, it's not clear the Freedom Foundation "dump the union" message is working.

Freedom Foundation says on its blog that it has caused 20,000 workers to drop their union

"They hate our agenda and what we're fighting for,"

— Union home care worker
Rebecca Sandoval

membership, at enormous cost to the union treasuries. But union officials say that number is fiction. Certainly some workers have dropped membership, spurred by Freedom Foundation mailings. But official filings from Oregon's biggest public employee union, SEIU Local 503, show no such losses. In fact, the union grew 1,458 members in the most recent LM-2 form it filed with the U.S. Department of Labor, which covers the year ending Sept. 30, 2017. [The LM-2 is a sworn statement unions must file annually detailing membership and finances.]

Grami, the Oregon AFSCME spokesperson, says Freedom Foundation is more parasite than predator: "I don't know that they're the existential threat they

think they are. Where they are troublesome is they do eat up time and resources that could be better spent elsewhere."

If Freedom Foundation appeals fail to persuade, it may be because union-represented workers are looking at them with healthy skepticism: Who are these paid canvassers showing up to my door to suggest that I save money by dumping my union? Why are they so interested in stopping me from paying union dues? Who's paying for these mailers?

To obtain and publicize answers to questions like that, public sector unions set up their own non-profit, the Northwest Accountability Project.

Northwest Accountability Project combed through IRS disclosure forms to find out who's funding the Freedom Foundation. The group publishes its findings at nwaccountabilityproject.com. Funders include an array of politically active right-wing foundations associated with billionaires and millionaires

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