

Robinson Challenges Wu for First Congressional Seat

A Conversation with Candidate David Robinson

By Scott Laird

David Robinson, a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and Commander in the U.S. Navy Reserves is challenging Congressman David Wu in the Democratic Primary to represent the First Congressional District of Oregon.

Robinson, who lives in Aloha/Beaverton, has a Masters Degree from Oregon State University and has worked recently as the Director of Facilities, Fleet, Capital Planning and Development for the City of Hillsboro.

According to Robinson's campaign literature, he intends to bring engaged, responsive and respected leadership as the U.S. Representative for the region that covers Columbia, Clatsop, Washington and Yamhill Counties.

Vernonia's Voice had the opportunity to meet with David Robinson in mid-March and hear about his campaign to unseat Wu, who has held office for eleven years.

During our discussion, Robinson was knowledgeable and informed and provided some clear ideas for issues he would work to address and changes he would attempt to make. He offered and outlined specific plans for addressing Oregon's struggling economy, helping citizens who have been impacted by that economy, and the wars in the middle east. He also offered additional thoughts on bi-partisanship in Washington, D.C., and the job that our current Representative, David Wu, has been doing.

"The people in the First District need to make a determination of what they feel is the level of success and the level of engagement of Mr. Wu in the community and whether it's time for a change," said Robinson towards the end of our conversation.

During his Navy career, Robinson has worked in Iceland managing large construction projects and been posted to a number of other foreign countries working to provide humanitarian assistance, including Ascension Island, Puerto Rico, Japan, Haiti, Djibouti, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Yemen. Robinson worked on negotiating with governments, embassies, and NGO's initiating projects to drill new water wells, and build schools and medical clinics. In 1998, Robinson coordinated the Navy's support for the National Ocean Conference convened by President Bill Clinton, leading Robinson to develop an interest in serving in elected office. He has also served as an instructor at the Naval Academy in courses in leadership, naval architecture, ocean engineering, and advanced modern history.

"My background definitely shows an interest and commitment to public service," said Robinson. "This office has a broad range of issues it has to deal with; everywhere from the local level all the way up to policies that have

an impact all over the world. Understanding the linkage that ties Vernonia to policies around the world is important. My travels and my jobs throughout the world give me that broad perspective of how national policy affects things here in my home district."

I asked Robinson if he thought a newly-elected Congressman would have the ability and the influence to have an immediate impact in Washington, D.C. "A committed freshman Congressman, with a will and a drive to get things done, can be effective," said Robinson. "Kurt Schrader, in his first year in office, had a significant public law introduced and passed to protect Oregon's waterways. It can be done. Congressman Wu has introduced 115 bills in eleven years and only had two become public law-- one of them was to change the name of a post office."

Preferred Committees

Robinson says if elected, he would be interested in serving on the House Armed Services Committee (HASC), not just because of his extensive military background, but because he believes Oregonians are impacted by decisions made there. "We have a large number of Reservists here, National Guardsmen here, retirees and veterans here who are impacted by the decisions made in HASC," said Robinson. "Here in Oregon, we don't have a large active military force, but our perspective and input into those policies should carry weight."

Robinson says he would also be interested in working on Commerce, because Oregon has a strong jobs and business environment that needs to be addressed. He is especially concerned about Oregon's infrastructure needs and the international structures that exist that prevent Oregon businesses from engaging in foreign trade along the Pacific Rim region. "How those structures are improved will definitely improve the job environment here in Oregon," Robinson said. He says he is also interested in working on forests and farms, "...as that has a large impact into the local communities here in the First District."

Improving Oregon's Economy

When asked about ways he might work to improve economic conditions in the United States and in Oregon, Robinson was right to the point. "The short-term fixes are difficult. We should be looking, as we extend unemployment benefits, to tie that to incentives for employers to start employing people again and ramp up business activities. It used to be that foreign consumers helped drive our economy. We've lost that-- that edge to be the supplier of choice to the rest of the world and we need to fix that. It's a structural problem that's out there."

"The longer-term fixes involve building a well-rounded economy here in Oregon, not one that relies almost

solely on farms and timbers and high tech. When we rely on small slivers of the economy, we are not going to be recession-proof. We should be looking at revitalizing our ports in St. Helens and Astoria. These offer great opportunities for us to engage in trade, manufacturing and logistics-- and they are not being used properly. Also, the rail transportation system here in Oregon has been allowed to become degraded. Most of Oregon's goods are moved by trucks now and that makes Oregon's goods and Oregon's manufacturing less competitive. It's the most inefficient method and it's the worst form of transportation environmentally. The Ports of Tacoma, Long Beach and Los Angeles, even in a bad economy, they have ships lined up waiting to get pier space. And if you look at those areas, they are not just a logistics hub, they're a manufacturing hub. Not everything that goes on or comes off those ships are finished goods. They still need local businesses with good-paying jobs to do that finish work. So, revitalizing local ports ties into how to bring money from outside the state and bring it into Oregon. And the longer we can keep the money circulating here in Oregon, it's creating even more jobs."

"We also need to take another look at the 'Buy America Act' especially as it related to Federal Stimulus Funds. It was almost irresponsible that we didn't strengthen the Buy America Act provisions as it relates to stimulus money. Eighty percent of the monies we spend on stimulus projects are leaving our country. Other countries put in strong domestic purchasing requirements, and they've been able to recover much faster than we have."

War in the Middle East

Robinson's military experience gives him an interesting perspective on the current war effort in the middle east. I asked him about Iraq and Afghanistan. "The war in Iraq is winding down at the proper pace and we should look to see if we can accelerate that as much as we can. The policy to go in in the first place was definitely dead wrong. And now it's not an easy task to get that much stuff and that many people out of that country, and at the same time, be looking to do an intra-theatre move of all those assets from Iraq into Afghanistan."

"I am not one hundred percent on board about the President's policy there that is being rolled out. I think that the message we are sending the world by having General [Stanley] McCrystal in charge says we are interested in solving the problem with a gun. When the focus of what we should be doing is building civil capacity, building those institutions in place. I think a Civil Affairs General in charge would tell the world a much better story and tell the locals in Afghanistan a better story and tell everyone that we are serious about



building a long-term, stable society. We really should have focused more on building the civil capacity, holding the areas we held, holding the communications routes we held, and building up the locals' ability to house and feed and care for themselves and provide civil structures and industries to be self-sufficient and then expand to the periphery."

Bi-partisanship in DC

Robinson talked about the current climate of bi-partisanship in Washington, D.C. "I'm quite concerned about the breakdown in civility inside Washington. People need to be willing to sit down and engage with each other and recognize that they can have honest disagreements over policy, but at the end of the day they can go and enjoy each others' company. I have lots of acquaintances who I've worked with in the past, that are running for office, who I know I have strong differences of opinion with on policy. But it doesn't stop us from being able to sit down and have a beer together. I think having those past experiences of working together, we can start building those bridges of civility."

If Elected...

I asked Robinson what would be his main focus in Washington, if he were elected. "I would definitely like to work on what federal assistance is needed to break through those barriers that keep our manufacturing logistics base here in Oregon from being effective."

"Another thing I would like to see very quickly is something I'm calling the 'Higher Education Portability Act.' I would like to introduce legislation that takes into account that so many people in the down economy have gone back to school to improve their credentials and find a way to make ends meet. If someone has to move away to a different part of the country while in the middle of getting a degree, any credits they have previously earned are not necessarily transferable-- there is no mechanism for them to finish their degree. I would like to propose that an accredited institution, collecting federal money, would have to set up a system to allow people to transfer and finish."

"A third thing is to put consumer protection items in place that allow people to get back on their feet. In this down economy, people have lost their jobs, they've lost their homes and they are getting by on expanded unemployment benefits. People's ability to declare bankruptcy and get a fresh start was severely hampered a number of years ago when Consumer Bankruptcy Laws were weakened-- and I'd

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The Upper
Nehalem
Watershed
Council
invites you
to attend
its
quarterly
meeting.

Please join the council and guest speaker Chris Knutsen, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife district biologist. Chris will talk about Nehalem River stock status (coho and chinook) and 2010 temporary angling regulations. His office is located in Tillamook. Light refreshments provided.

April 22nd, 2010

7-9 pm

Vernonia Grange, 375 North Street in Vernonia

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Nehalem River photo by David Ellingsen