

Representative Witt Visits Vernonia

Oregon State Representative Brad Witt made an unannounced visit to Vernonia on March 29, 2013 and took time to sit down with *Vernonia's Voice* to talk about the current legislative session in Salem and some of the bills he is currently working on.

Witt is a Democratic member of the Oregon House of Representatives from District 31. He has been representing most of Columbia County and parts of Clatsop and Multnomah counties since 2007.

We started out talking about gun control. According to Witt, he doubts that any gun control bill will pass in Oregon this session. "When we arrived at the Capital I think it was common knowledge that some form of gun control would be passed this session," said Witt. "But every single session there are some bills that just fall off the wagon. Gun Control is one of those this time." Witt went on to say that he believes there is a critical mass around universal background checks and there could be a chance before the end of the session for a bill that comes out. Witt also noted that in his opinion the people that are writing anti-gun legislation do not have a good background on the issue and write things that "...are clearly untrue," and that the Second Amendment supporters also go too far. "Somewhere in the middle there is probably room for settlement and universal background checks is probably that middle ground." Witt also noted

that a lot needs to be done on the federal level to create a central depository for information to do those checks.

Witt talked about the fact that throughout his legislative career he has worked to pass legislation that protect consumers against fraud, protects communities against the lawless and protects those that don't have a voice—either people with little means or animals.

This session Witt has three public safety type bills he is working on.

The first is focused on impacting the problem of human trafficking, which Witt describes as "...a growing problem, which may be growing only because our awareness is growing, the problem has been there all along." Witts says the bill is designed to levy much harsher penalties on the perpetrators of this type of crime. Witt noted that discussion around the issue of penalties have led to further discussion about how to halt the problem altogether. Witt believes there may be an opportunity for Oregon to lead the way on impacting this global problem.

The second bill Witt proposed was a studded tire fee when they are sold to cover the damage each tire would be expected to cause to Oregon roadways. Witt has since discovered that there is no data to make that computation and the bill has now turned into a study that will provide the information needed to create a fee.

The third bill in the public safety realm is a bill that would ban the self-check-out of alcohol in grocery stores.

Witt also has several bills he is working on to protect those that he describes as "...without a voice."

The first would create an animal abuse registry. Witt admits animal abusers, like other abusers usually don't stop unless there is some type of intervention and that even then it may not stop. He also admits that a registry requirement may not be effective in stopping

abusers from continuing, but that this bill could impact those who traffic in animals from being able to collect them from animal shelters.

The second bill would, for the first time ever, protect large woody debris in Oregon's riparian zones from being removed. "Those large wood logs and stumps are critical salmon habitat," says Witt. Witt's bill would require that large woody debris be left unless it is a threat to life, livestock, property or transportation, in which case it could be moved but not removed.

Witt is also working on a tethering bill that establishes expectations for how animals are treated. Under this bill animals could not be tethered with a collar that could lead to suffocation or in a way that they could wrap themselves and be unable to move. The bill would also establish guidelines for adequate shelter.

Witt is especially proud of the bill he passed last session that banned Shark Finning. Oregon was the first state to ban the practice of catching sharks, removing their fins and tail and dumping them back into the water alive. The ban has since spread to other pacific coast states, to countries in Central and South America, to Australia and New Zealand, the British Isles and within the last six months The Peoples Republic of China has banned it as well. "It started here, in Columbia County," says Witt. "This is something that, as far as the impact on our everyday lives is not great, but it was the right thing to do."

Witt says he was involved in almost every key bill that was intended to halt the use and production of meth in Oregon and believes those bills have had a distinctly positive impact in the state. "We don't hear so much about that anymore," said Witt. "It worked!"

Witt is also proud of the trio of bills that he helped pass involving community protection that came directly from hearings that he and Senator Betsy Johnson held in Vernonia following the 2007 flood. "We took that information and held specific hearings in Salem based on the information we obtained here," explained Witt. Witt says the bills that were introduced now allow victims of a natural disaster to claim first day unemployment insurance, keep insurance companies from canceling your policy if you make a claim from a natural disaster, and make low or no interest loans available to community oversight entities in natural disaster areas.

Witt closed his visit by speaking briefly about the PERS situation.

VERNONIA'S
voice
reflecting the spirit of our community

Publisher and Managing Editor
Scott Laird
503-367-0098
scott@vernoniasvoice.com

Contributors

Lynn Berry
Mark Brown
Marc Farmer
Bill Haack.
Greg Kinz
Ms. Luna
Dr. Carol McIntyre
Aaron Miller
Jennifer Moloney
Michal Smith
Christopher Sedlmeyer

Photography

Scott Laird

Want to advertise?
Have an article?
Contact: scott@vernoniasvoice.com

One year subscriptions
(24 issues) \$35

Vernonia's Voice is published
on the 1st and 3rd Thursday
of each month.

Vernonia's Voice, LLC
PO Box 55
Vernonia, OR 97064
503-367-0098

www.VernoniasVoice.com

Witt says he believes that the executive branch of the state government has handed this issue over to the legislature incorrectly. Witt views PERS as a constitutional issue, governed by signed contracts. He believes the legislature has no power to make changes and that what needs to happen is that the signers of the contracts—the governor and the unions—need to renegotiate the contracts. "Everybody knows the present system is unsustainable," says Witt. "It's unaffordable in its own right and it is crowding out our ability to fund other things because all the money is going to fund PERS." Witt says he wishes the signatories to the contract would get together and try to reach an agreement.

Vernonia's Voice would like to thank Representative Brad Witt for taking time from his busy schedule to visit Vernonia and update our readers on his work in Salem on their behalf.

HELP FOR HOMEOWNERS.

If you're having trouble making your monthly mortgage payments and are worried about losing your home, Community Action Team can help.

Community Action Team

Serving Clatsop, Columbia and Tillamook Counties
for over 40 years

125 N 17th Street, St. Helens, OR 97501

(503) 397-3511

www.cat-team.org



OREGON
HOMEOWNER
SUPPORT.gov
Foreclosure Prevention Resources



Happy Hour Mon-Fri 4-7
Lady's Night Wed 5-12

"STILL BIKER FRIENDLY"

EVENTS

April 6
Play It Again Karaoke
April 13
Probable Cause
April 27
Dixie Wrecked

Now Beer & Kegs to go

- Specialty hamburgers
- Draft beer & mixed drinks
- Pool tables & satellite TV
- Special live music events
- Free Wi-fi

Sun - Thurs 11 AM - Midnight • Fri - Sat 11 AM - 2:30 AM
733 Bridge St, Vernonia • 503-429-9999

Cedar Side Inn



Taco Tuesday
from opening until 9 PM
3 hardshell or 1 softshell \$4.25

Prime Rib
every second Saturday
5-9 PM

Karaoke
every Friday
9 PM-close

Check our Facebook page for daily specials and upcoming events
756 Bridge Street, Vernonia 503-429-5841