

Salem Report



By State Representative Brad Witt

Greetings from Salem!

We are just wrapping up three days of informational hearings as our committees follow up on previous legislation to see if any adjustments will need to be made during our next session in February. Sometimes, best laid plans go astray and we need to make sure that we are getting the outcome that was envisioned from the various legislation that we pass. It's also gratifying to know when everything goes as planned, so here are a few updates from two of my committees, the House Veterans Committee and the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee:

Last session, the House Veterans Committee identified several critical areas of concern when it comes to the reintegration of veterans: family issues, housing, employment and education. Here is a thumbnail description of the progress being made with these issues:

HB 3391 created a Task Force on Military Families. The intent is to recognize the needs of the families left behind, sometimes during multiple deployments. The Oregon Military Department and the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs have helped about 50% of these families find the resources that they need by partnering with other state agencies. As the program continues to evolve the numbers will improve.

HB 2417 added \$5 to recording and filing fees collected by our County Clerks in order to establish a housing fund for veterans. One in every six men and women in homeless shelters is a veteran. The program builds on existing programs, particularly those established through the 18 Community Action Teams throughout the state, and it is producing good results, especially in providing affordable rental housing units. We will continue to monitor this worthwhile program.

HB 2158B requires public universities and community colleges to charge in-state tuition to veterans who can prove physical presence in Oregon within 12 months of enrollment. Although 70 students have qualified thus far, we will be revisiting this bill in February because the program only applies to newly enrolled students as of September 15th, not those already attending college. If it is fiscally responsible, we will be trying to expand the program to include all veterans who meet the residency requirements.

HB 3207B requires public employers to offer an interview to any veteran who meets the minimum requirements of the job search. So far, 978 veterans have been hired by our state agencies. Although this is great progress, we need to work on clarifying language in February to make sure that when it comes to the next step in the process, our agencies are applying uniform interviewing procedures that do not confuse the applicant.

The House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee spent quite a bit of time hearing from the Oregon Department of Agriculture, and other stakeholders, regarding the recent incorrect use of certain pesticides that led to a massive bee kill in June of this year. As you know, agriculture is a multi-billion dollar industry in this state, and the pollination of crops by bees is a critical component of that success. Although the EPA is the expert on these products, ODA is working with them to establish clearer labeling requirements, especially when it comes to the application of various pesticides.

At a minimum, Neonicotinoids, a classification of insecticides, will be restricted in use. The ODA is particularly concerned with those who use these products around the home, as this may actually be a greater threat to our bee population than use by the agricultural industry. For instance, some systemic insecticides last up to 6 years in woody plants like roses. Overall, because of pesticides, habitat loss and disease, beekeepers testifying before the committee indicated that they are experiencing 30-40% losses in their bee populations. The ODA will continue their efforts to educate the public through the Master Gardener network, OSU Extension offices, and of course, the retailers who sell these products.

Other information to come

before the Ag Committee included the progress of the "Aggie" Bond program, and the Boat Check program. Aggie Bonds, a reduced interest rate borrowing program, are a creative way to assist the next generation to get into farming, or to continue working the family farm, when the price of land and equipment are making these investments increasingly prohibitive. With 50% of our agricultural land destined to change hands in the next 10 years, Aggie Bonds may be the only vehicle for some farmers to stay in the business.

The Boat Check program was instituted by the 2009 Legislature, and its purpose is to stop the importation of Quagga and Zebra mussels into Oregon, mostly by boaters visiting our lakes and rivers from states that have been infested by these highly destructive organisms. Once they gain a foothold, there is no known way to get rid of them. They multiply at an astronomical

rate, completely blocking water intake systems used by hydroelectric facilities and municipal water supplies, and they voraciously consume nutrients needed by native fish populations. The Boat Check program, which inspects boats entering Oregon on our state highways, has been outstandingly successful. The Legislature will continue to keep an eye on this effort to make sure that it has the resources needed to prevent the introduction of this destructive little invader into Oregon's waterways.

Finally, I want to alert all of you that the deadline for applying for health coverage under the Cover Oregon program is December 4th, for those who wish coverage to begin on January 1, 2014. Here is a link to the website; you can download an application from this site and submit it by fax, mail or PDF: <http://www.coveroregon.com/get-started/overview>

Things To Ponder

By Grant Williams

Every year "Thanksgiving" kicks off our holiday celebrations. Brown roasted turkey full of stuffing, yams with brown sugar, marshmallows and butter, mashed potatoes, rich thick gravy, green beans, pumpkin pie, and my favorite, pecan pie, are just some of the treats we love to share with our families and friends as part of the annual festivities. Although the food is delicious, that is not what the holiday is really all about; it is supposed to be a time spent reflecting on all the blessings in our lives. The good things we have enjoyed because of God's love and grace. I trust this year was no exception and you were able to find an abundance of things to praise the Lord about.

In Matthew chapter 22 a Pharisee asked Jesus what was the greatest commandment. Jesus told the man to love the Lord your God with your whole being and to love your neighbor as yourself were the greatest commands (paraphrased). God expects no less from us than He gave of Himself. The apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 4:4-5, "...when the right time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, subject to the Law. God sent Him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the Law, so that He could adopt us as His very own

children."

As "Thanksgiving" fades into the background and we start to approach the season traditionally reserved for celebrating Christ's birth let's keep in perspective the things that are most important. We have been greatly blessed to live in America, the land of the free. We have been given the privilege of accepting or rejecting God's greatest gift, His Son Jesus Christ, who loves us. When we count our blessings going into the New Year I hope we are able to put Jesus at the top of the list of things we are thankful for. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Now that is something to be truly grateful for!

Please be reminded that the "Open Door Gathering Place" meets on Wednesdays at 7:00 PM at the Vernonia Grange. We will not meet on the evenings of December 25th or January 1st so people can spend time with their families. If you would like to contact me I can be reached at pastorgrantwilliams@gmail.com or 503 702-3553. My prayer for each of you is that the Lord will bless you richly, that His face will smile upon you, and you will know His presence this holiday season!

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