

Salem Update

By Representative Brad Witt



Work has begun in Salem once again. Thanks to everyone who has been contacting my office to share your thoughts

and feelings on upcoming legislation. A great way to stay abreast of topics or bills that you care about as we move through this Legislative Session and it's 3000 expected bills, is to set up alerts on topics or bills that you care about. The Oregon Legislature webpage has some great tools to keep you up to date: <https://www.oregonlegislature.gov/>

I also welcome visitors. If you are planning a trip to Salem and your State Capitol, please contact my office! It is YOUR Capitol and I work for you! It was a pleasure to meet with several folks from our district in my office this week who talked to me about their programs and their hopes for the future.

Most legislation that flows through this building never raises an eyebrow, but every once in a while, a bill comes up that strikes a chord and over the last two weeks, we have received literally hundreds of emails and phone calls regarding SB 324. Much of this response was generated by a mailer (read hit piece) that was sent to our district misrepresenting my position on the bill.

First of all, it's important to understand what SB 324 does – it removes the sunset provision of the Clean Fuels Program. Sunsets are placed on bills when the Legislature decides that they want to “test drive” an idea and then reevaluate it several years down the line to make sure that it really worked. With this particular program, I have come to the conclusion that the program has not worked as envisioned, and furthermore, it impacts my district negatively. Having been the legislator that cleared the way for the passage of the original Clean Fuels Bill in 2009, by resolving issues surrounding the impact of the bill on Public Utility Districts and the trucking industry, I feel uniquely positioned to evaluate the differences between the initial efforts and where the current legislation takes us.

Let me state from the outset that I consider reductions in carbon pollution essential to long-run global stability...economically, socially and environmentally. I applaud the sponsors of SB 324 for their efforts in

committing our state to its fair share of carbon reduction. Unfortunately, however, the proposed legislation has too many shortcomings to allow it to become law.

For the past four years, I have been assured by proponents of SB 324 that an effective and timely means of abating excessive fuel cost increases caused by the legislation would be developed. Four years later, that has yet to occur, and that raises several red flags.

First, broken commitments mean broken trust as far as I'm concerned. I have little faith that the program is ready for roll out, that all the necessary safeguards are in place or that the advocates are capable of managing that which they have created. Secondly, a demonstrated inability to develop an effective abatement formula gives me little confidence that the proponents are competent to administer the complex energy credits system laid out in the bill.

This leads me to the third red flag: SB 324, also known as the “Clean Fuels Bill,” is supposed to make more clean fuels available to consumers. This is a thoroughly admirable goal, but here's the rub... among our more traditional fuels, it's already “mission accomplished.” Try finding any non-ethanol gasoline these days. You can't – just ask all the upset boaters, snowmobilers and small engine enthusiasts around our district if there's any unblended gasoline to be had. And for those consumers who've moved on to electric cars, propane or a host of non-traditional fuels, it's been market

forces (read transportation costs) that are leading to newer and cleaner alternatives.

With consumers unable to significantly reduce their individual carbon footprints on the one hand, while fuel costs threaten to rise substantially on the other, little remains of SB 324's original promise. What does remain is an energy tax credit system run by the State. This is my fourth red flag.

The last time Oregon got involved in something remotely similar, it was a disaster. Readers may remember the Business Energy Tax Credit (BETC) venture of the 2000s. Initially estimated to cost Oregon taxpayers \$3 million per project, with an original sunset date of 2012, the projects and costs spiraled out of control with final payments being made on July 1, 2014. The final costs are still being calculated. Current accounting shows \$947 million in project credits...the most generous in the nation.

I am fully prepared to extend the sunset on the Clean Fuels Program in order to design a program that actually works. I have invited my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to join me in a serious effort to make this happen, however the vote on the bill is scheduled for either this week or next. By the time you read this column you may know whether or not my efforts were successful. In any event, I am a “no” on SB 324 as currently written.

I appreciate all of you who have contacted my office to share your thoughts on this. Please call or email anytime 503.986.1431 and rep. bradwitt@state.or.us.

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