

A Conversation with Representative Brad Witt *continued from front page*

and trying to bring people into the community this summer, especially for the annual Jamboree celebration,” said Witt. “Both Senator Betsy Johnson and I approached ODOT and I think they were sympathetic to the idea that they could have caused a lot of issues for business here and they’ve changed their construction schedule and also assured us and the community that they’re going to provide an alternative route. I know it will be an inconvenience, but hopefully that’s all it is, an inconvenience and not a major loss of business. We were very encouraged by ODOT’s response and willingness to try and work with the community.”

Among the bills Witt introduced in the last legislative session, was HB 4056 which creates a stable scholarship fund for the children of deceased or fallen officers; HB 4111 which makes it easier for Oregonians to transition to required Real IDs; and SB 1541 to provide Oregonians with cleaner air by reducing toxic emissions.

Witt was also a chief sponsor on

numerous bills this past session, including HB 2565 which would help make it easier for veterans to get a college education since they tend to be older than the average student; HB 3340 which requires the Oregon Department of Education to develop and provide to public high schools written materials regarding apprenticeship opportunities; HB 2566 which expands hunter mentoring programs to include youth up to age 17; and HB 3158 which creates incentives for reporting poaching and other wildlife law violations.

Witt says the last bill will help create a comprehensive solution to address poaching of fish and wildlife in Oregon. “We’re really pleased with the coalition of groups and people we’ve been working with on this issue, including hunters and fishers, animal protection groups, and the Oregon State Police, Oregon Fish and Wildlife, and other law enforcement agencies,” says Witt.

Heading into the 2019 Legislative Session Witt says he would like his

constituents to have a heads-up on some of the issues he thinks might be addressed, so they can comment on them. “I always like to be informed by what people share with me,” says Witt.

Witt says he expects the upcoming session to include education funding and economic issues. “We’ve seen improvements and what investing in our economy can do to increase vibrancy,” explains Witt. “We’ve seen what those investments bring to our communities, especially investments in education. Those types of investments portend long term vibrancy. That is how we provide skills for our next generation of workers. That’s how we assure ourselves that our employers are going to be successful with a strong work force. And that’s how we ensure that our communities, be it local, county, or state, remain competitive not just with other states, but globally.”

Witt says he expects to see some new proposals on some pertinent community economic issues. “I think we may be looking at a somewhat different approach to address carbon reduction than has been tried before,” says Witt. “What we’re envisioning would be a much more direct approach to reducing carbon emissions. I think it would have much quicker results than what we’ve heard about to date, and it will offer probably the fastest reduction with the biggest bang for the buck.”

Affordable housing is another issue of concern for Witt. “We have a very big challenge state wide concerning housing,” says Witt. “I hear time and again that workers cannot afford to live in their houses or in close proximity to

their jobs, because it’s too expensive.” Witt suggests that the state find ways to encourage more housing construction, which not just benefits those in need of housing, but those who will do the building and those who supply the construction industry. “This is a chief way we have to expand our economy and we need to be very focused on building our supply.”

Witt expressed concern about the increasing friction between the urban and rural portions of Oregon. “We need each other,” says Witt. “We need to begin to understand the needs, wants, and interests of our fellow citizens across this state. The decisions that we make here in Columbia County or in downtown Portland have impacts on our fellow Oregonians statewide, and we need to always consider that. I think we need to take a lesson from the medical community, and when we make a decision, first, do no harm. If we start there, then we begin to rebuild the cohesiveness of our state.”

Witt closed with some comments on what he considers the biggest challenge facing the world today - global climate change. “Are we going to allow this to continue until it’s too late and we tip over the edge and we won’t be able to recover, or do we, as a global society, make it our imperative and deal with the issue?” asks Witt. “Several generations down the line it may become difficult for people to exist, economically, socially and environmentally if we don’t begin to act now. We’ve seen dramatic changes in the last decade and a half and the problems are just increasing.”

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