

## Wyden urges BPA to settle utility litigation

U.S. Senator Ron Wyden urged the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) to settle continuing litigation brought by public utilities, saying that the savings of contract costs and legal costs to BPA could ward off a projected rate increase for the utility's Northwest customers and also provide short-term reduction in rates.

In December 2000, a number of Northwest public power agencies sued BPA over the agreements BPA had struck with investor-owned utilities as part of a program called the "Residential Exchange."

That program is designed to allow customers of private, investor-owned utilities to enjoy the lower power costs provided by federally-affiliated BPA.

It allows BPA to provide either cash payments or additional power resources to the investor-owned utilities to keep costs down for those utilities' customers. In their lawsuits, the public power agencies alleged that BPA's exchange agreements provided more benefits to the investor-owned utilities than the Northwest Power Act allows. BPA is incurring enormous legal costs as the active cases continue.

During the energy crisis of 2001, BPA agreed to pay investor-owned utilities and others to cut back on their power use. In some of those agreements, BPA also promised to provide litigation protection for the investor-owned utilities - in the form of higher payments per megawatt hour - as long as the public power lawsuits remained in litigation.

The public utilities involved in the lawsuits recently presented a proposal for settlement, agreeing to drop their lawsuits if BPA can find a way to avoid this year's projected rate increase. A settlement could provide BPA with more than enough savings to avoid the rate increase.

If a settlement can be struck, BPA could save an estimated \$200 million or more in projected legal costs.

It would also release BPA from its commitment to pay additional fees to investor-owned utilities.



**STONE WALLED** - Jack Heald (photo right) holds up an Ashland granite plaque provided by Steve Chandler of 'Rock It.' Heald, who assisted stone mason Gaige Qualmann (photo above) build a 'rock billboard' in front of Select Market in Downtown Cave Junction, helped place the plaque. Many valley residents supplied unique rocks for the billboard. The billboard will be available to hold community event signs. (Photo by Steve Fairchild)



## Water conservation key for Klamath Basin

Farmers and others in Upper Klamath Lake area trying to make every drop count

Faced with another critical year for water supplies, irrigators in the Klamath Basin continue to conserve the resource in an effort to squeeze every precious drop that has been made available this summer from Upper Klamath Lake.

From taking land out of agricultural production to using well water on their own property, farmers in the basin are doing what they can to keep from drawing down lake levels deemed necessary for fish. It's a struggle, but the lo-

icals say they need to try.

"We are making every drop of water count and are focused on just trying to get through this year," said Rob Crawford, whose farm straddles the Oregon-California border south of Klamath Falls. Crawford is a member of the Klamath Water Users Association, which has adopted several conservation measures to address dry conditions.

While not quite as critical as the summer of 2001, when water from the lake was shut off to some 1,400 irrigators, this year's

water levels in the lake have been precariously close to triggering another shutoff.

Last week's decision by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (USBR) to reclassify the current water year has lowered the required lake level, allowing some water to be used for irrigation.

With crops already in the ground and some \$200 million invested in seed and other agricultural inputs, the prospect of another shutoff was a blow to every farmer in the basin.

## Smoking on the job: Teen searches for nicotine

(Editor's Note: This guest opinion is by Shannon O'Connor, a 17-year-old senior at Aloha High School in Beaverton.)

By SHANNON O'CONNOR

I admit it. My first day on the job, I was so scared I cried.

I mean, I had walked into this store and asked the clerk for a pack of cigarettes. I was 14.

For the past three years, I have been among approximately 25 teenagers who work in the state's federally required program to check tobacco retailers' compliance with laws against sales tobacco sales to kids under 18.

My cigarettes of choice are Marlboro Reds. Not that I've ever smoked one, you understand. And, as I said, the first time I ever tried to buy cigarettes I was scared. I felt others

in the store were judging me.

Perhaps that's the whole point.

A little background: When I try to buy cigarettes, I go into the store alone. A few moments later, a retired plainclothes state police officer follows me in to observe. I ask the clerk for my Marlboro Reds. If the clerk asks my age. I am required to tell the truth. If the clerk sells to me, the officer cites the clerk as soon as the transaction is complete.

Do clerks sell? Sure, but you might be surprised by how many don't. In fact, I have to listen to a lot of lectures from clerks.

"I'll bet you're still in high school," one told me. "You have your whole life ahead of you. Why are you starting now?" A lot say, "Do you know it's illegal to buy cigarettes when you're under-age?"

One clerk took down my name and address, said he gives this information to the local police. One told me, "Don't try that ever again."

These clerks' responses are encouraging. They are in contrast to a new set of radio commercials that will air until August on 40 stations outside Willamette Valley. One features teen-agers talking about how easy it is to buy cigarettes and chewing tobacco.

For the past three years, clerks statewide have sold 17 percent of the time. I'm told that's better than the federal goal of 20 percent, but it's still a lot

for a product that's illegal to sell to a minor. It's a lot when you figure the fine is up to \$600.

Why do clerks sell? I've had clerks not ask my age, even though it's hard to mistake me for an 18-year-old. I've seen clerks put my birth date through the scanner, and then conclude that the scanner must be wrong.

Sometimes clerks who sell are just distracted, either by a store full of customers or by a personal phone call. When they are cited, some clerks get angry. Some cry. Some apologize. How do my friends feel about my job? Maybe you know the words "no way," as in, "No way do you have a job trying to buy cigarettes."

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**Word of the Week**  
Kickshaw:  
1. A tidbit or delicacy, especially one served as an appetizer. 2. Something showy but without value; a trinket; trifle.  
Webster's College Dictionary.

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