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Merkley Prioritizes Rural Economic Opportunities in Agriculture Spending Bill

Bill will promote affordable housing, forest health, and energy efficiency and includes funding increases for food banks

Oregon's Senator Jeff Merkley, the top Democrat on the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture, announced today that included in the Senate Agriculture Appropriations bill are key provisions to boost rural affordable housing, energy efficiency, and forest health, among other economic priorities for rural America. Merkley also announced a large funding increase for food banks for the second year in a row.

"Rural communities across the nation are struggling to create middle class jobs and keep their economies afloat," said Merkley. "This bill delivers key wins for rural communities by helping create jobs, keeping people in their homes, and investing in agriculture."

Key elements of the legislation that passed the Senate Appropriations Committee today include:

Rural Energy Savings Program: \$8 million for the Rural Energy Savings Program, a program that Merkley created to allow rural homeowners and business owners to obtain low-cost loans for energy efficiency renovations. This funding will support approximately \$60 million in loans to complete renovations that will help conserve energy, lower emissions, and save consumers money on their energy bills.

Rural Affordable Housing: The bill includes several provisions to address properties across the country that are in danger of leaving the low-income housing program, depriving rural communities of affordable housing. The bill allows nonprofits who take over management of these properties to recover management expenses and earn a small return on their investment the same way the current for-profit owners do. It also includes an \$11.6 million funding increase to support rehabilitating low-income housing and facilitate transfers of ownership to keep housing in the program, and a new \$1 million technical assistance pilot program to help nonprofits and housing authorities facilitate transfers. The bill also directs the Department to engage affordable housing advocates, project owners, tenants, and others to find acceptable and effective long term solutions that will retain projects in the affordable rural housing program.

Forest Health: In an effort to provide additional tools and resources to help manage our forests, reduce the threat of wildfires, and restore healthy forest ecosystems, the bill directs the USDA to study and report back on the feasibility of new financing mechanisms that could leverage private dollars for forest health restoration projects.

Food Banks: An additional \$5 million for the Emergency Food Assistance Program designed to help food banks with storage and distribution. Combined with last year's increase, the program has seen a 20% increase in funding under Senator Merkley's leadership.

Sustainable Agriculture: The bill increases funding by \$2.3 million, to \$27 million, for the Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) program. SARE is the only USDA research program focused solely on sustainable agriculture practices and farmer-driven research. The program has helped develop innovative farm practices ranging from no-till farming to pest and weed management to supporting pollinators. Oregon's large organic agriculture sector benefits significantly from the program.

Agricultural Research: The bill increases funding for the overall Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI) by \$25 million (to \$375 million). AFRI is the nation's largest peer-reviewed competitive grant program for agricultural sciences and funds agriculture research on topics including plant health and agriculture production practices, food safety, and agriculture economics.

Minority and Veteran Farmers: Maintains \$10 million in mandatory funding and adds \$3 million in discretionary funding for outreach and assistance for minority and veteran farmers and ranchers. The bill also directs an additional \$5 million in new funding to veterans outreach activities in the Office of the Secretary for Veterans Affairs, as well as funding for the Appropriate Technology Transfer for Rural Areas (ATTRA) Armed to Farm program.

The bill was voted out of committee today on a bipartisan vote. The next steps would be for the bill to be sent to the Senate floor for a full Senate vote, and eventually to be merged with a counterpart bill from the U.S. House of Representatives in order to be passed by both houses and signed into law.

Breakfast With The Speaker

You are invited to have breakfast with the Speaker of the Oregon House, Rep. Tina Kotek, and her host, Rep. Cliff Bentz, at the Sunridge Inn, Baker City, in the Sunridge Room, on Friday, June 3, from 7-8:30 a.m. (PDT).

This is an informal opportunity to discuss local and statewide issues with one of the four most influential people in the Oregon legislature. Rep. Bentz will moderate.

This is a no-host breakfast meeting. Please RSVP if you will want breakfast and arrangements will be made to have it available for you. The estimated cost of the breakfast is \$15 each.

If you are not having breakfast, the meeting is free.

Rep. Cliff Bentz is specifically inviting people who are involved in government, in one way or another, but anyone who wants to attend is welcome. It is not often that we have the opportunity to share our thinking with the leaders of the Oregon Legislature. Speaker Kotek, at Rep. Cliff Bentz's invitation, is taking two and one-half days to tour this area. Let's do our best to show our appreciation for her interest in our part of Oregon.

Mental Health and Dev Disability Committee

The Baker County Mental Health and Developmental Disability Advisory Committee/Local Alcohol and Drug Planning Committee will be meeting on May 31, 2016 starting at 12:00 p.m. at the Community Connection meeting room located at 2810 Cedar St. in Baker City. The committee will be discussing the Total Health Program.

Governor to Speak at Eastern Oregon University Commencement

Oregon Governor Kate Brown will attend and speak at EOU's Commencement Ceremony Saturday, June 11. The outdoor event begins at 10 a.m. at Community Stadium at 6th St. and "G" Ave.

"We're thrilled that Governor Brown has accepted our invitation to speak at Commencement," said Tim Seydel, vice president for University Advancement. "This is a great opportunity for her to visit eastern Oregon and connect with our students, faculty and staff."

No tickets are necessary and seating is available on a first-come, first-served basis. Free parking is available for the day in all campus lots, excluding reserved spaces. Guests should arrive early and bring sunscreen, water and a hat or umbrella.

The event will be streamed live at livestream.com/eou. Additional details and schedules are available at www.eou.edu/commencement.

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Baker County Museum Commission to Meet
The next Baker County Museum Commission meeting will be on June 9, 2016 at 1 p.m. at 2480 Grove Street in Baker City.

American Legion Auxiliary Poppy Program

American Legion Auxiliary Baker City Unit #41 distributed 2,500 poppies last year. The ladies will sit, stand and walk for hours throughout Baker City. The Baker City Unit has been a part of this community since 1934 and has served as ambassadors of the Poppy Program for 82 years!

Today the ladies range in age from 52 to 86 years young and can be found outside different stores throughout May. They also attend events in the summer, bringing awareness that veterans and their families are in need year-round. They also sell Window Poppy Cards to business' that support our nations veterans.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the gentleman for his generous \$100.00 donation last year for a single poppy. Thank you so much everyone, young and older, no matter how much the donation, for your continued support of our Armed Forces who gave their last full measure by sacrificing their lives for us at home.

The red poppy has become a nationally-recognized symbol of sacrifice worn by Americans since post-WWI to honor those who served and died for our country in all wars, reminding Americans of the sacrifices made by our veterans to protect our freedom. 100% of the donations collected directly support the needs of veterans, current military and their families.



Submitted photo
The Mayor giving the Poppy Proclamation to American Legion Auxiliary and the VFW Auxiliary.

Quick Facts:

- ♦ The red poppy came to symbolize the blood shed protecting America's freedom following publication of the wartime poem, "In Flanders Fields," written by Lt. Col. John McCrae, MD while serving on the front in World War I to honor soldiers killed battle.

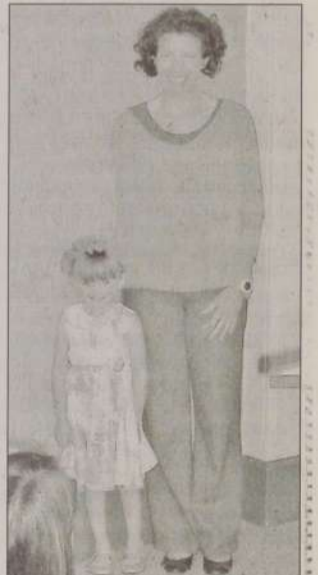
- ♦ The popularity of the red poppy as a memorial flower to those who sacrificed their lives in war began in November of 1918 when Miss Moira (pronounced mow-E-na) Michael was so moved by Col. McCrae's poem that she bought a bouquet of poppies on impulse – all that New York City's Wanamaker's Department Store had – and handed them to businessmen meeting at the New York YMCA where she worked. She asked them to wear the poppy as a tribute to the fallen. World War I was over, but America's sons would rest forever 'in Flanders' Fields.' Later, she would spearhead a campaign that would result in the adoption of the poppy as the national symbol of sacrifice. In 1923, the poppy became the official flower of The American Legion Family in memory of the soldiers who fought on the battlefields during WWI.

- ♦ Over 2,500 veterans hand-craft the flowers with assistance from unpaid volunteers. The veterans not only earn a small wage, which helps to supplement their incomes and makes them feel more self-sufficient, but the physical and mental activity provides many therapeutic benefits for the veteran.

- ♦ Poppies are not sold by volunteers – they are "distributed", with requests that a person receiving the poppy make a donation to the Poppy fund to support the Auxiliary's veteran outreach programs.



2016 Poppy Girl Raevyn (pronounced Raven) Whiting and Poppy Chairwoman Trudy Ingraham (also Grandma).



Our Poppy Girl with the Baker City Mayor Kim Mosier.

