

DISUNITED FRONT GOING TO D.C.

Every year local officials travel to Washington, D.C., in a "United Front" (UF) lobbying trip for federal pork.

But just how "united" is that front? It turns out that despite the label, it doesn't mean that the local officials are actually united in supporting the project list presented to Congressional delegates.

Acting City Manager Angel Jones and city lobbyist Brenda Wilson described the process at a Jan. 15 council meeting. Each city prepares its own list and approves it independently; then the lists are combined into the United Front list for the lobbying trip.

Councilor Bonny Bettman questioned how the Eugene Council could approve and back the UF list without actually seeing or approving the entire list of projects. "Why aren't we as a council approving the entire list?"

"I see a problem brewing," said Councilor Alan Zelenka. Springfield has put two new freeway interchanges on the UF list "so they can grow in a different direction," he said. Springfield's promotion of the \$90 million in interchanges "clearly competes with the Beltline project where people are dying" in accidents due to unmet safety needs in Eugene, Zelenka said.

The UF label "is very confusing," Mayor Kitty Piercy said. The lobbying effort shouldn't be presented as Eugene endorsing the Springfield projects. "It shouldn't be presented as what it really isn't, and that is a concern for me."

The name "means to me that we're going forward united" in support of the project list, Councilor Andrea Ortiz said. "Maybe we need to change the name of it."

But Piercy said, "I don't want to change the name, I don't want to tear it apart."

A motion to officially recharacterize the UF was defeated 5-3 with Ortiz and conservative councilors who support Springfield's pro-sprawl agenda voting no.

—Alan Pittman

LOCAL GROUP WANTS REY IN POKEY

Thanks to a court case filed by Eugene-based Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics (FSEEE), a federal judge is threatening to put Bush administration official and former timber lobbyist Mark Rey in prison.

The case centers on the Forest Service's use of aerially dropped fire retardants that are toxic to fish. FSEEE Executive Director Andy Stahl wants the Forest Service to assess the environmental impacts of the chemicals, which have been used on forest fires across the country.

The fire retardants contain ammonia-based fertilizer and sometimes sodium ferrocyanide, which converts to free cyanide when it is exposed to ultraviolet rays through water. Tens of thousands of fish in Oregon and elsewhere have been killed when fire retardant was dropped on waterways.

Rey is the undersecretary of agriculture in charge of the Forest Service, and according to Stahl, FSEEE became involved with the issue when a Forest Service employee's work developing an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the use of the retardant was "buried" by Rey.

In a ruling in August 2007, Montana federal Judge Donald Molloy gave Rey three months to either complete the environmental review of the fire retardant or appear in court: "The time I am giving is likely to prove insufficient if: 1) the agency is simply unwilling to follow the law; or, 2) it is prevented from following the law by its political masters, as was the case when Under Secretary of Agriculture Mark Rey ordered that formal (Endangered Species Act) consultation regarding fire retardant not to occur," he wrote.

In Friday, Jan. 11's ruling, Molloy found that Rey and the Forest Service still had not complied. He writes that the "record in the case shows the Forest Service had no real intention to comply with the law or the Court's orders."

Molloy has set a hearing date of Feb. 26, writing, "In my view, the Forest Service is in contempt of the law and the prior orders of this court."

Stahl says, "It's an extraordinary case of the government thumbing its nose at Congress and the courts."

If Rey and the Forest Service do not comply with the order to conduct an EA by the hearing date, Molloy writes that he is considering these sanctions: He will have Rey placed in a "correctional facility," place him "under house arrest subject to electronic monitoring" and/or enjoin the Forest Service from using any fire retardant except water until it complies with the court's orders.

"There's never really been a case like this before," says Stahl, "I don't know of any instance where a public official was jailed for violating environmental law while in his official capacity." He says, "But I don't know of any case where the government has been so duplicitous." —Camilla Mortensen

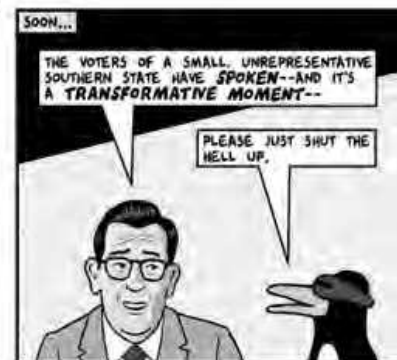


Mark Rey

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW

THE ADVENTURES OF CONVENTIONAL WISDOM MAN



news Briefs

PAPER OR, CHOKE, PLASTIC

Sanipac and the city of Eugene plan to ban plastic bags from recycling bins because they are choking sorting machinery, according to a city newsletter.

In November 2006 Sanipac announced that bags could go in the mixed bins. But In October 2007 a sorting company in Portland told Sanipac that the bags were wrapping around the pulleys, axles and screens in sorting machinery. The bag-choking caused facility shut-downs and resulted in "significant volumes of other plastics not being recycled," according to the city.

In response to similar problems, San Francisco recently banned plastic bags. Australia, Bangladesh, Ireland, Italy, South Africa, Taiwan and several Alaskan Native villages have also restricted plastic bags, which can choke wildlife. Portland and a host of other cities and states have considered ban restrictions, which grocery lobbyists strongly oppose because plastic bags are cheaper.

Many environmentalists have argued that the best option is reusable bags. Failing that, paper bags made with recycled materials are better than plastic bags made with oil, bags that take a millennium to decompose when

buried in landfills.

Sanipac plans to mail customers a notice later this month banning bags from bins, the city newsletter said. The city is working with area grocers on a "return to retail" campaign to offer a way to still recycle some of the bags, which can be remade into composite lumber.

Part of the campaign includes display ads in *The Register-Guard*, which delivers tens of thousands of papers every day, often in plastic bags. —Alan Pittman

OREGON'S HIGHEST COUGAR KILL

Last year marked Oregon's highest cougar kill, with a total of 509 cougars killed by hunters or through other means. Oregon Fish and Wildlife sold 41,813 cougar tags at \$11.50 each to hunters in 2007, prompting Brooks Fahy of Eugene's Predator Defense to ask, "What's the message that sends?"

Oregon has an estimated 5,100 cougars, according to ODFW, but the agency's draft cougar management plans calls for a reduction of that number to 3,000, which the agency calls "much greater than the minimum number of individuals required for genetic and/or demographic viability."

ODFW has targeted three areas in which it wants to cut cougar populations, causing an

