

# DeFazio Does It

DEFAZIO TAKES ON THE FRUMIOUS BANDERSNATCH AND OTHER OREGON ISSUES by Camilla Mortensen

**C**ongressman Peter DeFazio is taking his vorpal sword in hand again. In this time of political confusion that pits Tea Partiers against the Democrats and the Dems against themselves, and when half of what politicians say makes no more sense than Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky," Oregon's longtime 4th District representative takes great pleasure in cutting through the political confusion.

His Oct. 5 Occupy Wall Street-inspired diatribe on the economy and the financial bailout was vintage DeFazio. It's not often that CSPAN coverage spawns a viral hit, but the clip of DeFazio railing against Wall Street and accusing financiers of having "gambled our economy into oblivion" is giving it a shot despite a lack of media coverage.

If it seems like DeFazio's last congressional race just ended, it did. Members of the House of Representatives are elected every two years, while senators run every six years. There's little more than a year to go before the 2012 election, which looks to be a rematch with DeFazio running against Tea Party Republican Art Robison. The fray has already begun.

*EW* sat down with DeFazio to hear what he had to say about everything from Wall Street to county payments to the upcoming elections.

## American Awakening

"DeFazio is one of the few congresspersons that is with the 99 percent," writes one of the commenters on the less-than-four-minute general speech before the House in which DeFazio took swipes at Republicans, financiers and the Tea Party. "There's been this amazing political jiu-jitsu where somehow the Republicans aided by the Koch Brothers who subsidized the Tea Party have changed the narrative," DeFazio says in the clip. "It was the government. It was over regulation. Over regulation?" he asks sarcastically. "Oh come on guys, there were no rules; they gambled our economy into oblivion."

He continues, "But now this fall, something's happening. Something in this land is happening, I call it the American Awakening. The occupation of Wall Street, which is now spreading to other cities." DeFazio defends the protesters against critics who say they ought to be looking for jobs: "Their future has been stolen from them ... No, they don't have jobs! What are we doing to create jobs and give these kids a future in this country?"

"It is time to begin to deal meaningfully with these problems in this country," DeFazio says.

This isn't the first time DeFazio has stood up and yelled about what he believes, and it's not just Oregonians who have noticed his tendency to get a little hot under the collar and go forth kicking ass and taking names. Back in 2009 the Oregon Democrat came to national attention not just when he voted against President Obama's stimulus bill, but also when Obama, in response to DeFazio's call for more infrastructure spending, said to him, "Don't think we're not keeping score, brother."

News-based satire newspaper and website *The Onion* did a feature on DeFazio in November 2010 in which the representative was the sole survivor of a literal congressional bloodbath, with lines like "the 12-term Oregon congressman and de facto leader of the free world acknowledged that although many challenges lie ahead — including explaining his situation to foreign nations, figuring out how to print money, and combating the marauding bands of Tea Party activists now violently patrolling the streets of Washington — he remains confident that he will soon be able to get the U.S. government back in working order."

## DeFazio on the Economy

The real DeFazio is pretty confident he could get the government back in working order, if given the chance. And for this senior member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, infrastructure is the name of the game. Obama's jobs bill is OK, he says, and better news is that the president has been stepping up lately,

"This is kind of like the guy we selected and elected and voted for, for like two weeks now, and that's great," DeFazio says. "He has said he isn't going to just take cuts, and he wants investment, so that's good."

But the congressman doesn't hold back on his critique of the president and his administration's handling of the economic crisis: "If you look at the bill itself, it's 11 percent infrastructure, about another 7 percent school construction. Basically, building things is less than 20 percent of the bill, and 57 percent of the bill is tax cuts. And tax cuts don't work."

"I like the fact he's fighting for something," he says of Obama. "I like the fact that some of it is infrastructure and schools, but it's not enough."

DeFazio says he's "taken a lot of flak recently for being too critical of Obama." But he says to his own critics, "I'm trying to help. He has to succeed. Democrats have

to succeed so we don't wind up with someone like (Texas Gov. Rick) Perry as President."

According to DeFazio, we have been cutting taxes since 2001, and we've expended 5 trillion dollars on them and doubled the debt. "We have the economy of tax cuts based on a quaint theory of economics that was relevant when I was in college, which was a very long time ago," the 64-year-old congressman says.

Former president George W. Bush tried to solve the problem by writing big checks to a lot of people, DeFazio says. The idea was that folks would spend money and buy things. But "if people buy stuff, it was made in China," he says. Or people used their refund to pay down debt or save. He says Obama's former top economic adviser Larry Summers' solution was to give so little money that people won't know they are getting it and thus they would go ahead and spend it. "I said 'Larry, that's really bad economics and really bad politics,'" DeFazio says, "but other than that it's a good idea."

DeFazio made headlines in 2009 when he suggested in an MSNBC interview that President Obama should fire Summers and Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner.

If he could choose a new principal economic adviser, it would be 2001 Nobel Prize in economics winner Joseph Stiglitz. DeFazio also says that he'd go with 2008



PHOTO BY TODD COOPER