

'Lifeline Energy' plan may hurt elderly, Bellamy tells Blue Mountain council in Heppner

A legislative hearing between the Blue Mountain Economic Development Council (BMEDC) and State Representative Billy Bellamy took place recently at the Neighborhood Center in Heppner.

John Canaday, chairman, presided at the hearing.

The BMEDC discussed increasing its council membership to have more participation. Member Don Hanson said it is hard to get interest because, "When people get older, they feel they have done all they should. They complain when they don't get enough but they won't do anything about it. It is nice when someone else does the work for them."

The BMEDC has more than \$1.5 million budget and the council is meant to represent displaced persons, the elderly, Head Start programs, foster child and parents organizations, senior meals, and the low-income elderly in the Blue Mountain Region.

Bellamy then commented on some of the topics concerning the council.

Bellamy said the Lifeline Energy Plan sounds good but it may hurt the low-income elderly.

Lifeline would adjust utility rates so the more a person uses, the more he is charged. That would reverse the present rate systems which do not penalize for inefficiency. Lifeline would end up hurting the elderly in big older homes that have not been insulated properly, Bellamy said.

Bellamy said utility companies may endorse the Lifeline plan but he feels money for the weatherization of older homes should be made readily available.

He said he is against the Energy Coupon concept for low-income persons.

"I don't like any coupons because then you have to look for fraud and you spend more money monitoring and policing the program than you do on the program itself," Bellamy said.

Bellamy commented that he does not know what committees he will be on at the next legislative session because that depends on the Speaker of the House. Last session he was on the Education Committee and the Environment and Energy Committee.

"I had excellent input," he said. "Seniors show a lot of support and they have an effective voice. We always seem to be able to get money for programs but with so many rules and regulations we are not allowed to spend it the way we want to."

BMEDC member Hanson told Bellamy that his goal as a member of the council is to see to it that senior citizens receive meals five days a week in Hermiston.

"Those are the only meals many of them get," he said. "We (the United States) feed the world but not our own neighbors."

The BMEDC, which has 11 members but only six were present, decided to have Bellamy respond to some of its priorities.

The council and Bellamy agreed that the Adult and Family Services hours should be extended. The Heppner office is only open from 8 a.m. to noon Wednesdays.

They also agreed that a landlord-tenant bill should be made so the landlord would receive some kind of credit for weatherizing a renter's home or apartment. The bill should include rules that the landlord could not raise the rent to help pay for the weatherization, they agreed.

The BMEDC asked Bellamy if he supports state funding for shelter homes for battered persons. The council said it is against the present law that states that a restraining order cannot be filed against a person unless the spouse has filed for divorce.

"It is a danger for police to mix in family disputes," Bellamy responded. "Police will waste a lot of time with

people who will abuse a law like that. How would you write it so the police wouldn't have to go to the same houses every month? Police are not

marriage counselors. Providing shelter to homes does not solve the problem," but he said he still supports limited funding of them.

Bellamy said he will encourage legislation that will make it easier for the five counties in the Blue Mountain Region to obtain liability

insurance for their buses. The council showed concern that the federal government will cut federal revenue sharing in an effort to balance its

budget. The Heppner Neighborhood Center, according to Pat Brindle, receives half of its funding from revenue sharing.

Bellamy said he does not support federal revenue sharing, although he does support many of the programs it

funds. He said money in federal revenue sharing should be kept at the state level.




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