

## Salem Scene

By Representative Brad Witt  
Oregon District 31



People from my district, often ask what is going on at the Legislature, and specifically, what I am working on. I would like to introduce you to several bills that I have had drafted, and why I thought they were important to our district.

The first bill I'd like to share with you is HB 2721. Undoubtedly, you have heard about the tremendous increase in the theft of metal, including street signs, bridge railings, copper wiring, brass, stainless steel, vehicle radiators, basically anything that is metal. This reflects both the high price of metal on the recycling market, and all-too-often, the compulsions of meth addicts and their ilk. The bill will increase the penalty for failing to maintain a metal purchase record from a Class B misdemeanor to a Class C felony, with a maximum of five years imprisonment, a \$125,000 fine, or both. It also requires the purchaser to keep a detailed record of the transaction, including a description of the property, its original intended use and any identifying marks. The seller of the goods will be required to provide a photo ID, and the license number of the vehicle used for delivery will be recorded. Hopefully, this will put a serious dent in the trafficking of stolen metals.

Another bill that responds to the times is HB 2875, which creates a felony offense, with varying degrees of gravity, for the sexual solicitation of a minor. This bill is in response to a frightening problem described to me by Vernonia Police Chief Matt Workman. Briefly, a predator in the Los Angeles area was seeking to establish an internet relationship with minors in Vernonia, and while they were able to track the perpetrator, the laws were not adequate to be able to prosecute. In this age of internet chat rooms, we find out, sometimes too late, that our children are being drawn into relationships that can result in severe trauma, even death. This bill is intended to send these perpetrators to prison along with a possible fine of \$125,000 fine, or both.

The next one is HB 2876, commonly referred to as the "Apollo Alliance Bill." It requires the State Department of Energy to investigate measures to reduce energy consumption in state-owned or state-funded buildings and school districts. It also requires the Department to perform energy audits on the buildings to determine energy consumption patterns, climactic factors, the condition of existing energy systems, and where system upgrades might provide energy savings.

One of the first questions regarding this bill is "Where is the money going to come from to retrofit older, inefficient buildings?" That is the beauty of this project...it is revenue neutral. The companies involved with the Alliance make the needed energy updates, and are paid from the savings realized by the public entity, over a specified contract period. The benefits are multifaceted: It saves the public money; it conserves energy; and it creates good jobs. If you would like a more in depth description of the program, go to

[www.apolloalliance.org](http://www.apolloalliance.org).

HB 2722 increases the maximum penalties associated with severe animal abuse. National statistics show that many offenders begin a pattern of person-to-person violence with neglect and/or aggravated abuse of animals. I'd like to thank Amanda Flahaven, a student from Scappoose High School, for bringing this information to my attention. Ms. Flahaven asked why, when these patterns are well documented, our laws are relatively toothless. For example, a recent case of animal abuse involving torture and dismemberment was only a misdemeanor. Hopefully, this bill will allow us to identify offenders much earlier in the progression, provide meaningful penalties, and stop the behavior in its tracks.

Another move in the right direction is the introduction of two bills, SB 643 and 644, which would establish a task force to study the impact of aquatic invasive species (ANS) on our waterways. As someone who represents a district commonly referred to as the "River District," I am acutely aware of how serious the environmental and economic threat would be if these ANS are in ballast water that is discharged into our rivers, streams or estuaries.

I would like to share two examples of these invaders, the zebra mussel and the mitten crab. The zebra mussel was introduced into the Great Lakes area in 1982, and within ten years it had spread to the entire Mississippi, Tennessee, Hudson and Ohio River Basins. This mussel forms dense encrustations, damaging municipal and industrial water supply systems, and severely altering the food web by competing with existing species such as salmon and walleye.

The mitten crab is already on the West Coast, having been introduced into the San Francisco Bay area in 1992. These crab are only 3 inches in diameter, but they burrow, causing major erosion of riverbanks and man-made levees; they have also been known to eat the eggs of salmon and sturgeon. They also block critical pumping stations and fish diversions, and their sharp claws cut through the mesh of commercial fishing nets.

I don't need to tell you what kind of havoc these two invasive species could wreak on the rivers and estuaries of the Columbia River Basin. We have worked hard to establish a thriving shipping industry and a sustainable estuarine ecosystem. As vessels ply our waters, we need to make sure that, along with their precious cargo, they do not also discharge the seeds of destruction of our marine environment, as well as our municipal, industrial and recreational infrastructures.

I am pleased to be a primary co-sponsor of these two bills, and will continue to shepherd them through the process so we can begin to assess the threat and devise appropriate solutions.

Please don't hesitate to contact my office with questions or comments about this article or anything regarding state government.

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## Letters

### Businesses need the support of residents

To the Editor:

My husband and I have lived in Vernonia for 12 years now and feel we have put a lot of effort into trying to make Vernonia our home. We almost gave up a year ago, our frustrations almost got the best of us and we were very close to selling our place and moving to another state. We have since realized that we are not quitters, and we are going to dig our way out of the hole and allow God to work in our lives.

We feel the need to let the community know that we are still willing to do what we can to provide a trusted and competitive business in Vernonia, we would like the support that most Vernonia Businesses deserve. Why do Vernonians shop at home depot when there are hardware stores in our town who put so much effort into carrying as much as they can possibly hold to suit us? Why do Vernonians drive all the way to Hillsboro when there are two awesome vets who take their time and gas plus pay building overhead to make sure they are available to Vernonians? Did you know that our vets still do house calls occasionally? Did you know they are much less expensive for some procedures than most out of town vets? Did you know you could purchase a yard of some of the nicest fabrics right here in town, or take a sewing class for \$5-15. Where else can you do that?

I have not mentioned what my business is as I am not really here to advertise. I just wish a few Vernonians realized that we downtown businesses have to work twice as hard to maintain our buildings, as most of us own them and they are not new structures; we have higher overhead than many, as our utilities are more than home owners; we owners seldom are able to pay for labor so we work long hours to be here for the community.

Yes, we choose to own our business but certainly not because we are looking to get rich. We want to support our community. Take the time to come downtown on a day off and check out our shops. We are far more friendly than any

you will find out of town, we can save you the drive for most anything you need. Many of us would be willing to bend over backwards to get the privilege of serving you as a customer. Give us a chance, come in and see. Support Your Community, Shop Local.

Sincerely,  
**Lisa Edgar**  
"Creatures"  
Vernonia

### Peace rally and vigil set for March 18-19

To the Editor:

Dear Friends of Peace and Justice in Columbia County—

On Sunday, March 18, a Peace Rally will be happening in Portland at Pioneer Courthouse Square at 1:30 (for more info check out [www.pdxpeace.org](http://www.pdxpeace.org)). The Columbia County Peace Vigil that we hold on Sundays from 1 to 2 will be canceled on the 18th; instead we can meet at 33421 SW Maple (outside the CC-CHD/ROP office) in Scappoose, carpool to the closest MAX station and ride together into Portland to join the rally there. For more local info. on commuting, contact Craig at 503-543-3678.

Then we will hold a special vigil on the 19th (yes Monday) from 5:30 to 6:30 at the Totem Pole in Scappoose. CCCHD just signed up for an Iraq War Anniversary Vigil on a shared date with similar MoveOn vigils across the country. Americans across the country are more concerned than ever about our direction in Iraq. Now is the time for Congress to force a change.

This March 19th, thousands of us from organizations across the movement will gather together to observe the fourth anniversary of the war through candlelight vigils. We'll solemnly honor the sacrifice made by more than 3,000 soldiers and contemplate the path ahead of us. We cannot send tens of thousands under-equipped and unprepared soldiers into the middle of an un-winnable civil war.

**Please see page 22**

**Between the Bookends,**  
the Library column, has been moved to page 10.