

Salem Scene

By Representative Brad Witt
Oregon District 31



It seems impossible that more than three months have elapsed since the Legislative Session adjourned on June 28th. Since that time, I have participated in a number of summer festivals in the district, attended a National Conference of State Legislatures' symposium in Boston, and returned to full time employment at my "regular" job. I was able to grab a few days of rest while in the Boston area, which afforded me the opportunity to spend some time with family. All in all, it has been a great summer.

In reviewing the information that continues to flow from Session, I wanted to be sure and make all the residents of my district aware of the new expanded Oregon Prescription Drug Program (OPDP). Some of you will already be familiar with this program as it was originally created in 2003. At that time, the Legislature authorized the formation of the OPDP to help increase access to prescription drugs by the uninsured and to lower the costs incurred by local governments when insuring their employees. On March 1, 2005, the program went "live" with an initial enrollment of 1000 eligible Oregonians.

On December 7, 2006, the voters of Oregon passed Measure 44 by a 78% majority. Measure 44 removed the eligibility criteria and opened the program to any resident without prescription drug coverage. The main purpose of the measure was to leverage purchasing power by increasing the number of those insured. The 2007 Legislature took it one step further and opened the program to the "underinsured" of all ages and incomes, regardless of whether or not they are already covered by an existing policy.

How do you know if you qualify? You qualify if you are:

- An Oregon resident
- You are uninsured or underinsured for prescription drug coverage

How do you know if you are underinsured? If you already have insurance and the drug costs more using your present insurance card than it does by using the OPDP card, you are underinsured. The average saving is about 43%. These savings are the result of pooling drug purchasing power, so everyone will benefit by your enrollment.

This program is for people without health insurance or those who have insurance but could use help paying for prescription drugs in specific situations. Some situations could include the following:

- They are on Medicare and fall into the "gap" where they pay 100% of drug costs
- They need a prescription drug their insurance plan formulary doesn't cover
- They have a deductible and use the drug discount program to reduce their out of pocket costs. (Note: If your carrier has a discount for out of pocket expenses, you may only use one card, not both.)
- They are waiting to have a pre-existing condition covered by their insurance plan
- They are a new employee lacking insurance and are waiting to become eligible
- Their medical coverage does not offer drug benefits

This program will not only benefit individuals, but it will also assist our small business community as they struggle to be able to afford medical coverage for their employees. Government agencies, cities and counties are also eligible to join the pool. If you have signed up for Medicare Part D prescription coverage, you are still eligible for this program. This is the first concrete step towards our goal of creating universal health care coverage in Oregon, so please take a moment to investigate the benefits of the Oregon Prescription Drug Program.

I also encourage you to pass this information along to anyone that you think might benefit from this new program. There is no cost to enroll and you may enroll online at www.opdp.org, or by calling the ODS Companies directly at 1-800-913-4146. The online site contains a full description of the program, how to enroll, a list of participating pharmacies and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQS).

I hope you have all had a wonderful summer, and that you are heading into Fall refreshed and renewed. It's a beautiful time of the year, and I look forward to seeing many of you at various functions throughout the District.

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Ike Says

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poose Unit for archery bulls stayed the same at only 22.

Learn about Salmon at the Vernonia Salmon Festival October 6 in Hawkins Park

I will finish this column with a comment about ODF&W's deer forecast for the Saddle Mountain Unit. Evidently my definitions of a MODEST deer population and DECENT buck hunting are different than the department's. I tend to go with dictionary definitions, so this would be my fall deer forecast for the Saddle Mountain Unit. "The deer population in the

Saddle Mountain Unit is low and the harvest of bucks will be miserable." Now go to a dictionary and look up my words versus the department's and ask yourself, who sees the real picture here?

Izaak Walton League, Nehalem Valley Chapter meets monthly on the 3rd Thursday at 7:00 p.m. Call 503-428-7193 for location.

Measure 49: Not a One-Size-Fits-All approach to development

Voters will soon receive ballots for the November 6 special election. They will be facing two statewide measures, Ballot Measures 49 and 50, which are being hotly contested in advertising that either promotes or opposes the measures in language and graphics designed to convince voters that the sky is falling. Well, the sky isn't falling, but each of these measures is likely to affect Oregonians for many years. In this issue, *The INDEPENDENT* will try to make sense of Ballot Measure 49.

Though most Oregonians remember Measure 37, a little history is in order. Voters approved Measure 37 in 2004 thinking it would add fairness to longtime property owners whose land was reduced in value by statewide land use regulations that limited development on forest and farm land.

A typical argument used to promote Measure 37 was that farm or forest land owners should be allowed to subdivide so their adult children could reside on the home property.

Opposing arguments included the spectre of a junk yard next to a church, or an adult entertainment business next to a school. Both arguments were designed to convince voters that the sky is falling.

The sky didn't fall, but many people who voted for Measure 37 were subsequently distressed to find that their neighbors' ideas on good land use could have negative conse-

quences. When there were enough complaints, legislators decided voters should have another look at the issue. Measure 49 was developed to provide that opportunity.

The primary concern seems to revolve around large housing developments on farm and/or forest land, a concern that was triggered by M37 claims from owners of industrial timber land, especially Stimson Lumber Co. (20 claims in Columbia Co. alone, all zoned PF-76 and all for residential development).

Measure 49 would amend M37 to let landowners build up to three homes if that was allowed when the property was acquired. It would also allow construction of up to 10 homes if that was allowed when they acquired the property and if reduced property values justify the construction. Additionally, it would extend rights to surviving spouses whose names were not on the property at the time of acquisition, and allows the transfer of these rights to new owners.

Measure 49 would prohibit the development of subdivisions on high value farm or forest lands, or lands with groundwater shortages. Groundwater is a concern in many areas, including the Nehalem Valley, where aquifers are erratic and sometimes go dry in summer.

Claimants who have received land use waivers under M37 may complete developments if they have established vested rights to do so.

Fire season over; burn permit needed

Fire Season officially ended on Monday, October 1. With the end of fire season, forest operators are no longer required to have fire suppression equipment and fire watch services as part of their operations. Public fire restrictions have also been lifted. Orange "Regulated Use" signs indicating these restriction are found throughout the county. These orange signs will be removed over the next week. However, private forests may have restrictions that apply year round.

With the end of fire season, the Columbia County Fire Defense Board has lifted the ban on open burning. Burning will

be regulated on a day-to-day basis by local fire

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Some materials can be recycled locally

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Station on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month from 8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m., or at D.A.D.'s Recycling, behind the Transfer Station, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

For more information regarding the event or any other Solid Waste issues, contact Columbia County Solid Waste Administrator Bill Potter at 503-397-7213.