



Legislative Report

Representative Brad Witt



March 20, 2008

www.leg.state.or.us/witt

E-Newsletter Volume 2, No, 34

rep.bradwitt@state.or.us

Hello again,

There have been a lot of things happening in our district over the past couple of weeks. Even though some of the news has not been what we would have liked, I am encouraged by the positive attitude displayed by the residents in our coastal and river communities. In this newsletter I would like to discuss two issues, the cancellation of the ocean fishing season and the work of the task force that I helped create that deals with invasive species.

As many of you already know, the Department of Fish and Wildlife cancelled the season for sport and commercial salmon fishing that had been set to begin on March 15th. This applies to the fisheries south of Manzanita all the way to the California border. This step was taken because of the declining returns of coho and chinook salmon for the third year in a row, particularly within the Sacramento River system.

The decision to close the season, at least temporarily, was not an easy one for the Pacific Fishery Management Council, the regulatory body that sets ocean salmon seasons. Hundreds of families depend upon these carefully determined seasons to make a living. Nevertheless, these fishermen have taken a very balanced approach, recognizing that taking the few fish migrating now will most certainly jeopardize improved fishing in the future. They are to be commended for their foresight and strength.

Hanging over the whole issue is the question of what is happening to impact the migration of this highly prized symbol of the northwest. Whatever the reason, the fishing industry needs our attention right now. All three Governors from California, Oregon and Washington have asked the President for a disaster declaration so that these fishing communities can access economic assistance. I have every confidence that this request will be honored.

Besides the fishing concerns that we have as a state, we also have another issue that is becoming more prevalent in Oregon as we increase our global trade. The issue is "Invasive Species," which, simply expressed, is a form of biological pollution. Because we use our waterways as major highways for transporting goods, it is possible to introduce harmful, non-native plants and animals that can degrade our native habitats and displace indigenous species.

I was privileged to co-sponsor a bill in the 2007 Legislature that sought to address at least one aspect of this problem. SB 643A created the Shipping Transport of Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force. This Task Force is charged with studying and making recommendations for combating the introduction of

aquatic invasive species into waters of the state, particularly with regard to ballast water discharged from shipping vessels and also the broader range of shipping related pathways.

Just one example of the kind of chaos that can result from an invasive species is the story of the proliferation of the zebra mussel in the Great Lakes region. The zebra mussel is a small, non-native mussel originally found in Russia. It was introduced to North America in 1988, by transatlantic freighters, and it soon spread to the Mississippi, Tennessee, Hudson and Ohio River Basins. The mussels will colonize all types of surfaces including boats, water intake pipes, docks, even other animals. In 1989, the town of Monroe, MI lost its water supply for three days due to massive clogging of the city's water intake pipeline. Fortunately, Oregon has not yet been plagued with this little mischief maker but it has been detected as far west as Lake Mead in Nevada and this is a clarion call to be vigilant.

The Columbia River is unique among other major ports along the west coast with respect to its freshwater habitat and the significance of its grain export industry that results in a substantial amount of ballast exchange, hopefully offshore, from foreign arrivals. And although it is critical that we recognize and address issues that may be unique to Oregon, a major goal of the Task Force will be to reach integration with Federal regulations and with our neighbors, California and Washington. My part will be to make sure that we have language in statute that will facilitate these partnerships and also the continued enforcement capabilities of the DEQ. Since my entire district borders the Columbia River, I am especially committed to the success of this Task Force.

On a lighter note, I wouldn't want to end the newsletter without congratulating the Lady Columbians of Rainier High School. They won the state basketball championship in Salem last week, the perfect end to a perfect season! Way to go, ladies! Your talent, your hard work, and your tenacity paid off and your community is so very proud of you. Congratulations to you all and to your coaching staff!



Photo Courtesy of The Clatskanie Chief

Finally, this will be the last newsletter for a little while. State election law imposes a "blackout" period on any communication, such as a newsletter, sixty days prior to an election, which in this case is the primary on May 20th. In the meantime, I am sure that I will run into many of you as I make my rounds in the district. I will leave you with some pictures of two events that I was pleased to attend last weekend...



This young man is Jacob Johnstun, 14, from Rainier High School, and he is one of only a handful of students from this area to be chosen as a student ambassador to Europe. He is a remarkable young man who has earned \$7,000 for this trip by holding multiple fundraisers, including this spaghetti feed that I was happy to attend.

There was a great turnout for the annual Knappa Schools Foundation Auction. They earned over \$61,000, their most successful year yet! Sen. Betsy Johnson and I are shown here visiting with the crowd.

