

Southern Oregon PBS

What are my legislative priorities right now?

1. To help make Medicaid, a federal program for the disadvantaged, sustainable. I'm working with a team of Oregonians, led by former Governor John Kitzhaber to do just this. As a member of Congress's Energy and Commerce subcommittee on Health, I have the opportunity to directly participate in making this program work better.

2. To help pass the "Fix Our Forest Act". This legislation will help save our forests and Oregon communities from the horror of wildfire and protect our forests and our watersheds for future generations.

3. To help protect millions of acres of the sagebrush steppe in Malheur County (sometimes referred to as the "Owyhee Canyon Lands") for future generations. I have reached agreement with Senator Ron Wyden on the content of a bill that will do just this. We will be introducing identical bills in the House and in the Senate to accomplish this sometime in the next few weeks. Great credit is due Senator Wyden for his years of work on this bill.

4. To help Medford obtain its Southern I-5 interchange. I just met with the Associate Administrator of the Federal Highway Administration to review and discuss this 340,000,000-million-dollar investment in Southern Oregon's economic and safe future. I mentioned to him that this project is key to an emergency (and hopefully temporary) flow of traffic north and south on will have to be an improved Medford Foothill Road should the 3,229-foot viaduct now carrying that traffic collapse, as it most certainly would, in an earthquake. I also mentioned to him that there is an enormous economic opportunity for Medford and Southern Oregon.

5. And in an addition to the above we are working on the following: removal of the ESA from FEMA's activities; helping Burns, Oregon, recover and rebuild from flooding; helping Douglas County recover from the severe rain event of several weeks ago; introducing a bill to allow The Dalles city water system to expand; working to obtain funding for a street and freeway improvement in Pendleton; supporting the national delisting of the thousands of Grey Wolves; protecting tribal gaming; working on the Name, Image, and Likeness college athlete issue; and so on.

President Trump's Tariff policies.

This is a complex area, and dangerous area, and the facts keep changing. However, there is no doubt that the United States has lost tens of thousands of manufacturing jobs over the last 40 years. In 1979, manufacturing jobs comprised 22% of employment in the United States. Today, the number is 8%. The cause? There are multiple causes, but one is the outsourcing of jobs to other countries. Another is the locking up of our natural resources. Another is the explosion of bureaucracy and regulation. As a result, the US has become wildly dependent upon other countries for essential things such as computer chips, rare earth minerals, and a veritable multitude of different products. We are at being held hostage by China and many other countries because they have the processing and the control of materials, we have to have to protect ourselves, operate essential systems (power lines, for example), and so on. China, in particular, has used and continues to use commercial production practices that ignore anti-trust laws and destroy competition. The only way to address these practices is with strong, targeted, reliable tariffs.

Yes, I support the President's efforts thus far, through tariffs, to bring this nation back to some semblance of self-sufficiency.

Are you aware of the group ORD2 Indivisible? If so, what do you think about their assertions that you don't represent them as constituents? Folks at recent protests expressed they wished you would do more to stand up for Oregon's specific interests rather than voting in lockstep with the party. Your thoughts?

The Indivisible group has repeatedly picketed my Medford office; last year it organized a pro-Palestinian "dead baby" event where they followed me through downtown Medford repeatedly targeting me with some 20-30 stuffed pillows soaked with red paint designed to look like babies; hammered on the windows of one of the rooms I was speaking in as I spoke at a local Medford community meeting; coordinated rude and shrill participation in my recent four live town halls; recently accepted my invitation to come into my Medford office to discuss issues of their choice with my staff while I was in Washington DC; sent hundreds of form letters to my office expressing their displeasure with many of my votes; called my office countless numbers of times; and in summary, done its best to exercise its constitutional right to be a loud and unfortunately obnoxious presence in an area where its positions are clearly the minority view. (See the November 2024 Jackson County majority pro Republican election results)

So yes, in answer to your question, I am and have been aware of the Ashland Chapter of Indivisibles participation in the nationwide, ultra-liberal, anti-Trump, Soros supported Indivisible organization.

In response to Indivisible's assertion that "Congressman Bentz doesn't represent us" I will simply point out that much of what I do helps the very community the Indivisible folks live in, so

I am representing them. To the extent I vote in ways disagreeable, they have the right to campaign and vote against my re-election. That's how America works.

Do you believe that environmental policy is within state, county, and city jurisdiction? In other words, should the Federal Government be able to invalidate state environmental/climate/energy laws as the recent executive order from President Trump suggests?

Authority over environmental policy should be determined by the scope of impact of that policy. If the policy affects more than one state, the Federal Government is generally the proper authority. If the policy affects environmental issues in just a state, then the state should generally have priority. Obviously, given the nature of "environment" it can be difficult to determine where authority begins and ends. Deciding which level of government is the proper, legal and constitutional arbiter of environmental matters has been addressed many times by Federal courts. The outcome of these challenges depends on the legal standards already in place, and the facts of the case.

The executive branch has the power to execute and enforce federal law. Executive orders recently issued attempting to reinstate federal authority, refer, as the basis for the Order's efficacy, to the constitution and to preemption. These references anticipate court challenges.

It is my opinion that the states should take the lead in setting their environmental policy, but much of the area is already "occupied" by federal statute. I prefer local control over federal, because local laws generally give people greater opportunity to be heard. However, if a state engages in excessive regulation of its people under the guise of protecting the environment, and in so doing interfere with people's property rights, and violate the constitution's protections of commerce, then the federal government or the federal courts should act. I think that many of the President's executive orders push the legal and constitutional envelope and will be challenged in court. How this will ultimately be resolved is not predictable.

Where do you stand on whether the President has the authority to use executive orders to override financial decisions made by Congress (such as halting distribution of funds through the IRA and other programs)? Should "power of the purse" remain with Congress?

Under the Congressional Budget and Impoundment act of 1974 the President is required to report to Congress when he impounds funds as a deferment (temporary) or a rescission (permanent). It is my understanding, gained in speaking with the Executive branch, that the President, as the law requires, will soon be asking Congress to enact a rescission bill. What will be in that bill and how much Congress will agree to has yet to be discussed.

The consistent frustration we heard from citizens at recent protests is that you are difficult to engage with - that you seldom respond to messages from constituents, have no town halls planned for this area, and don't seem to change course based on feedback. How do you respond to these assertions?

Those that say I am “difficult to engage with” are probably unhappy that I have not yet, this year, held a live town hall in Medford. They choose to ignore:

1. The annual live town halls I have held each year for the past four years in both Medford and in Grants Pass, usually in the summer or fall. Did they attend these town halls?
2. My repeated participation on the Bill Meyer Show.
3. My repeated appearances on KOB
4. My repeated appearances on KDOV
5. My repeated appearances on KAJO in Grants Pass
6. My repeated appearances and speeches at the Republican Lincoln Day Dinner – I have participated in this event 5 years in a row
7. My visit to Southern Oregon University to meet with its President.
8. My tours of many of the businesses in the Medford valley
9. My participation several of the annual Veteran’s Day events in Central Point
10. My attendance several times at the annual Homebuilder’s event in Medford
11. My tours of and help in responding to the horrific fires in Phoenix, Talent and Medford
12. My visits with the water districts and discussions of various means of addressing Medford and surrounding areas water related issues
13. My visit to and conversation with the former director of the Ashland Shakespeare Festival
14. My visits to various small businesses across the Medford valley
15. The fact that I maintain my largest field office in Medford.

We receive about 300 calls a day (sometimes daily calls are in the thousands). We actually answer our office in DC and our District phones. We receive hundreds of emails each day, many times from emails that people forward to us—by the hundreds. I meet with people in my D.C. office every day, and this includes dozens from my District. We receive numerous letters, and we try to respond to each. We do have a telephone town hall planned for the Medford area in the next several weeks.

I decided not to hold live town halls for the next few months because after holding four live town halls (in Baker City, La Grande, Pendleton, and the Port of Morrow) just a few weeks ago, I

realized that those attending were more interested in staging a protest than in engaging in a civil exchange of ideas or discussing differences of opinion on the issues. If folks want to protest, they are certainly free to do so, but I have no inclination whatsoever to assist those who seek to use town halls as a platform for misinformation and display of overt rudeness. It is my plan to hold a Medford focused telephone town hall within the next several weeks.

Finally, this is not in any way a complete list of the things I have done and the events I have attended while traveling around the Medford/Grants Pass area. It is simply an attempt to show that I appreciate the fact that this area is an important part of the state of Oregon and of course of CD 2. I will continue to make the effort it takes to meet constituents who live and work and choose to retire in that area. I would suggest that those concerned with my involvement take a look at a map of CD 2. It is the second largest congressional district that is not an entire state in the United States. In addition to Jackson County, I represent another 19 counties. 70,000 square miles. 700,000 + people. I cannot spend all of the time I'm not in Washington in the Medford valley. Those other 480,000 people in CD 2 deserve attention too.

There is clearly a great deal of division in this era. How do you see the future? Are there reasons for Oregonians to be optimistic that the current course of government will result in good outcomes for them?

Of course I'm optimistic. Fuel prices are coming down. The Border is secure. Supply chains are being reconstructed so that America is less vulnerable to foreign nation extortion. Ineffective, obstructive, expensive government regulations are being removed which will lead to increased productivity. Bloated government payrolls are being reduced- but essential services are going to be maintained. Tax policy favorable to the economy is being continued. Essential government programs such as Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid are being protected. Trade policies harmful to the United States are being addressed. Artificial Intelligence, one of the most important creations in human history, is being supported and encouraged. Education will continue to be supported but with a dramatic reduction in federal mandates. A secure border allows incremental improvements to our immigration system. Our two trillion dollar a year deficit is actually being addressed.

Change is hard. But no one truly believes that we can keep ignoring what China is doing to our security and our economy. Or our two trillion a year in additional borrowing. Or environmental policies that destroy rather than protect. Or outright theft of valuable government services. Or the multitude of other problems our nation faces. We Republicans are addressing these problems head on. To wait longer will make change even more difficult. The best reason for optimism is that we are actually trying to fix these problems. And that means now, not some never arriving tomorrow.