

Cliff Bentz for State Representative
Oregon House District 60

ISSUE PAPER

To: Fellow Eastern Oregonians,

My name is Cliff Bentz. I am a third generation Oregonian. My maternal grandfather, Paul Stewart, came to Oregon about ninety years ago and established himself as a rancher in Harney County. My paternal grandfather, John Bentz, also came to Oregon about ninety years ago. He established himself as a timber man and then as a farmer. I grew up on the Whitehorse Ranch (Fields, Oregon) and then on the Actin Ranch (Drewsey, Oregon), working with my mom and dad (Anne and Ken Bentz), an older sister, and five younger brothers. I learned just how important family, hard work, and education are to the success of a family business. I worked, during summers and school vacations, on the ranch until I was 23.

I was educated in Oregon at Pine Creek/Whitehorse Grade Schools, Regis High School in Stayton, Eastern Oregon State College in La Grande, and Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland. I now practice law in Ontario, Oregon, where I live on a small farm with my wife of twenty (20) years (Lindsay) and my two children (Allison-16 and Scott-14).

I have now spent thirty (30) years working with farmers, ranchers and businesses on their business problems. This work has involved families across Eastern Oregon from Klamath Falls to Pendleton, La Grande to Lakeview, and Imnaha to Ontario, and many points in between. It has involved water, land use, tax, grazing permits, partnerships, trusts, mediation, family law, and many other areas of interest.

It is with this background I share with you the following positions on issues that are important to all of us. Please be aware that this is an evolving effort and that as my understanding of the issues improves, I will be refining this paper and the positions reflected in it and adding to it.

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Economic Development.

Our local economies are suffering from the continued negative impact of forest land closure, reduced grazing, and ever increasing environmentally driven restrictions. Protecting and supporting the local businesses that have survived is the most important thing we can do. However, here are some additional thoughts on economic development:

- Build on, protect, and support our existing local businesses. If an existing local business has identified an opportunity for expansion, assist that business in every way possible. Make sure that local businesses are aware of the help that can be provided by city, county, and state resources.
- Encourage cooperation between educational facilities (high school, junior colleges, and colleges) and local businesses. If further training or professional assistance is needed, help bring these groups together.
- Help inform businesses about programs available at the State level such as tax credits, financial assistance, enterprise zones, and other business incentive programs.
- Identify barriers to business growth and suggest legislative solutions to those barriers. Hold round table discussions with business men and women to encourage and promote this identification process.
- Streamline our land use processes. Expansion of urban growth boundaries is ridiculously delayed and an unnecessary barrier to economic development.
- Help facilitate the construction and financing of sewer, water, and street infrastructures when businesses have identified property they could and would otherwise build upon.
- Identify and make available comparative state tax structures so that businesses can more easily understand tax benefits available in Oregon.
- Identify and encourage opportunities arising from the need for alternative fuel and “green power.”
- Identify tax credits that will help build desirable businesses in our rural areas.

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Water. Without water, our communities will die. Our Eastern Oregon culture, economy, and future rest on the legal foundation provided by our water laws. We must protect and defend against any damage to that foundation. Here are some of the current issues of concern:

- ***The Governor's "H2O" ("Headwaters to Ocean") project.*** The Governor believes that climate change will substantially accelerate run-off and reduce late season flows. His staff is studying a broad series of actions to address this concern. These actions could significantly and negatively affect use of water diversions for irrigation.
- ***The Columbia River Treaty.*** This Treaty, between Canada and the United States, will be subject to renegotiation beginning in 2014. This renegotiation will have significant impacts upon all users of water in the Columbia system. It could also dramatically affect the Malheur and Snake systems.
- ***Duck Valley.*** The Duck Valley Indian Reservation (in Nevada) has asked that Congress approve the Duck Valley Tribes's claim to water from the Upper Owyhee River. If approved, there will be a substantial withdrawal of water from the Owyhee system.
- ***Instream Use.*** Using "*climate change*" and other arguments as justifications, environmental groups are demanding greater allocations of out-of-stream water to in-stream purposes. This movement of water back instream is the situation in the Klamath. The Klamath experience, sadly, will be repeated in different ways, across Oregon.
- ***Water Storage.*** The Governor and the Oregon Legislature have recognized the value of storing water and did support allocation of about \$1,750,000 to a fund which is now available for those wishing to study storage projects.
- ***Navigable Water.*** A bill has been introduced in Congress (HR 2421) to remove the definition of "Navigable" from the Federal Water Pollution Control Act. If passed, this law will increase the power of the federal government over water on private property. We must do all that we can to encourage our Federal Representatives to prevent the federal government from taking control of our water. Using water quality as the means of controlling use of water is something that we must recognize as a major danger to water diversion systems.
- ***Metering.*** There have been repeated attempts to impose an obligation on water users to meter all water use. Many Watermasters say that metering makes no sense at the regulatory level. Notwithstanding this insight, metering will continue to be proposed. We must make it clear to those in Western Oregon that water metering is the first step toward water taxation and that this cannot happen.

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- **Education.** As Chairman of our local public school board, I have had the opportunity to learn about the needs and limitations existing within our school system. Here are some ideas that would help our schools:
 - **All Day Kindergarten.** Families, community, and educators should decide if they want all day Kindergarten. State funding should be allocated to school improvement funds and then local groups should decide if all day or half day Kindergarten is the right thing for their schools.
 - **Respect for Teacher.** Make absolutely certain that the parents are accountable for the behavior and actions of their children. Encourage the continued use of Positive Behavior models, and all other legal means to improve students' respect of teachers and of education.
 - **Training.** Encourage and support additional teacher training. Teachers have indicated a desire for that training. The Legislature should support opportunity to improve teaching skills.
 - **Basics.** We must return to a stronger emphasis on the basics (reading, math, and writing). In some schools "Reading First" has been a success. Care must be exercised so that while emphasizing one area we do not neglect another.
 - **Classes on Personal Finance.** All Schools must teach personal finance with an emphasis on the dangers of credit!
 - **Higher Education.** In an age of increasing global competitiveness, Oregon must support higher education, and focus its investment in higher education on areas that build local economies. The State Legislator must work closely with Eastern Oregon University, TVCC, OSU, and the U of O in structuring classes that help the employers in our rural areas.

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- **Rural Healthcare.**

As attorney for Holy Rosary Medical Center for 18 years, and after representing many doctors, nurses, and health care professionals. I know what it will take to bring and keep such professionals in our communities. Here are some ideas:

- Continue to support the placement of third year Medical School Residents in outlying areas. This will also increase the chance of having these Residents locate in rural areas.
- Encourage and support a minimum salary guarantee so that the doctor who locates in the rural area is making as much money as he or she would otherwise make in an urban area. This "subsidy" will have to be funded either through a tax credit or through a state supplement.
- Coordinate appropriate doctor relief from being "on call." Encourage the Oregon Medical Association to develop programs to find doctors who will provide "on call" back-up for rural doctors.
- Encourage more rapid accreditation and licensure (and reciprocity in limited circumstances) of out-of-state physicians so border towns are not prevented from having access to professional practitioners. This applies to physicians and nurses.
- Encourage and support the use of video conferencing facilities in rural and remote areas so that physician assistants, practitioners or EMTs can provide local assistance by using such technology.

- **Health Care Costs.**

The source of much of the funding for healthcare is federal. Close coordination of state proposals with federal politicians and legislators is essential. We must encourage Senators Smith, Wyden, and Representative Walden to support direct allocation of federal monies to Oregon so that the State, rather than the Federal Government, can use and direct those monies. In this fashion, the State of Oregon can coordinate more carefully the provision of medical care and services. If this control of federal funds can be obtained, the State can identify and prioritize those procedures which promote and produce health. In addition, we should:

- Refine means of delivery. Be more efficient.
- Create financial incentives so people are encouraged to reasonably limit their use of the health care system.
- Cause hospitals to publish their costs (encourages competition).
- Make certain that all parties using the system pay something for the use of that system.

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- **Immigration.**

Congress has failed to control immigration. The cost to Oregonians of providing medical care and other social services to illegal immigrants is huge. Although I support legal immigration, I do not support illegal immigration. Immigration is a federal issue, so what we can do at the state level is limited.

We want our state and local police to cooperate with federal law enforcement in the enforcement of immigration laws. However, we must be careful that Oregon does not end up paying for the incarceration/holding of illegal aliens. Arresting illegal immigrants so that they can be held at our cost is even worse than leaving the situation as it is.

Because this is a federal matter, we must encourage our federal legislators to:

- Do all they can to enforce immigration laws.
- Add additional funds and support to controlling entry and departure into and from the United States.
- Immediately design and pass a farm worker program which (1) encourages employers to assist in enforcement of the law, and (2) assists employers in finding people to do the work that previously was performed by illegal immigrants.

Our immigration laws cannot be ignored!

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- **Increased Use of Public Lands.**

I will do all I can to protect and increase access to our public lands. This means making sure that every County has fully utilized our RS2477 rights, and being certain that our Senators and Congressional Representatives know and understand that loss of access will create serious economic damages. Here are some additional ideas regarding timber and grazing:

- **Timber.** The failure of our Federal Government to appropriately address access to our Forests for logging and thinning activities is a travesty. I will:
 - Identify and support all current groups, in Oregon, supporting entry into and logging/thinning/utilization of the Forests.
 - Identify all organizations opposed to such use.
 - Identify the federal legislators that are actively working on these issues.
 - Identify the opportunities, at the State level, to encourage, promote, and support access and use of federal lands.
 - Identify the best arguments and the best justifications for use of the federal forest. Begin to assert these at all relevant levels.
 - Encourage leadership at the State level (Governor, Legislators, agencies) to support utilization of these lands.
 - Identify new opportunities justifying the use of public land arising from the need for alternative sources of power generation.
 - Identify arguments being developed at our universities and colleges that support increased utilization of the land.
 - Identify the arguments created by scientists and biologists that would support further utilization of our federal lands.
- **Grazing.**
 - Focus on the value grazing adds to federal land and the science supporting the use of range as a source of feed and fuel.
 - Identify and publish the value of utilizing cattle grazing as a forage reduction and fire suppression technique.
 - Identify the economic value of cattle grazing on public lands, and the disastrous economic impact should these cattle be removed from the federal land.
 - Identify those groups that have been successful in maintaining and retaining their grazing opportunities on federal land.
 - Identify the missed opportunity that the forage not being used could provide to the state and federal government.