

April 13, 2015

The Honorable Jessica Vega Pederson
Chair, House Committee on Energy and Environment
Oregon State Capitol, Room 285
Salem, Oregon 97301

Re: House Bills HB 3470, HB 3252, HB 3250 – SUPPORT

Dear Representative Vega Pederson,

My name is Christopher Ashby; I'm a firefighter who has worked on wildfires all across Oregon and throughout the western United States for nearly a decade. My work has included being a crew member on district engines, small modules focused on a fire's initial attack, and on specialized Hand Crews trained to respond to the most remote and potentially difficult fires. Throughout my career I've worked on small fires that started by lightning, and large fires with several thousand people involved that take weeks or months to manage as part of a long-term plan.

My understanding is that Oregon had a record-breaking fire season last year. As a firefighter, I'm faced with the need to manage the fire and put it out, while also accounting for, what seems to me to be a large influx of firefighter injuries and deaths over the last decade. I believe climate change is real, and it's affecting people like me, making an already dangerous job even more perilous. The fact that Portland has experienced its warmest winter this year is a very worrisome sign for this year's fire season. Our warm weather now is indicative of a drought, and that could mean an earlier start to fire season in Oregon.

One of the things firefighters may do to prepare for fire season is meet with meteorologists as part of their training. The meteorologists we meet with also believe climate change is a major problem, and that it makes fire season harder to predict. In my experience, every year is more unpredictable than the previous one. Unpredictable conditions and extreme weather make my job more dangerous. I don't want to charge into the mouth of a fire when I don't know what it will do next. The tragedy in Arizona in 2013 when 19 firefighters were killed is a haunting reminder of that.

One of the things I experience personally is how wildfires affect surrounding communities. These fires pose an impact to rural Oregonians, anyone who loves hiking or camping, and individuals with respiratory problems – I believe they are the ones most affected.

More intense, unpredictable fires means I and those I work with have had to back off and watch them more than in years previous. They burn for days longer, spewing smoke into faraway towns and cities, creating a haze none of us can avoid.

You have three bills before you which represent an excellent line up of policies that get to the heart of transitioning off of the dirty fuels that contribute to climate change, and transitioning to clean and efficient energy. As someone working on the front lines of the climate crisis, we must address climate pollution **now**. The science is not disputed; I am witnessing the detrimental effects of climate change every year -- on our forests, our communities, our eco-tourism sector, and our economy. I urge you to consider the three bills before you and take seriously the need to put a price on climate pollution -- for all the firefighters in the field working a job that becomes more dangerous each year; for all Oregonians who want to see Oregon and its citizens prosper and thrive.

Sincerely,

Christopher Ashby
Wildland Firefighter