



SB 1507 - A16& -A17 Another Farm Perspective

Testimony for House Revenue - Jody Wisler

I want to tell you a farm story with a different perspective than the one you're hearing in this building. It's a very personal perspective, but my TFO colleagues found the story to be instructive.

My dad, a farmer who sold wheat, cotton and alfalfa in global & regional markets, would identify with Oregon's farmers, especially those who live near a state border. Our California farm was seven miles from Arizona, a state with dramatically different tax, wage and environmental laws and regulations. He would understand their dismay at the proposed minimum wage increases because like my dad, Oregon farmers compete in a global marketplace and with neighboring states.

Decades ago, when facing a similar campaign to increase farm workers pay and benefits, my dad suddenly began providing medical insurance and a retirement plan for his farm employees. That was his solution -- to keep Cesar Chavez away from our farming community. Neighboring farmers, also feeling the pressures of Chavez's campaign, upgraded their offers to employees as well.

To be clear, the farmers were not motivated by altruism or recent profitability. They felt forced to make a change that would keep Cesar Chavez away! What was the result? The farm owners became wealthy a bit slower and my father probably retired farming 4000 rather than 5000 acres. All of them continued to compete in a global marketplace and none of them went bankrupt!

As for the farm workers—an encounter with a classmate at a high school class reunion revealed the benefits of my dad's decision. This Hispanic immigrant spent his entire working life as a year-round farm laborer in my home community. Because of the changes made, he could afford medical care for his family and today his retirement account now adds \$345 a month to his meager social security check. Those two changes are monumentally important to him. Someday, hopefully Oregon farm workers will be able to report similar improvements to their lives.

Major shifts in economic fairness between those who "have more" and those who "have less" often are initially met with dismay and consternation. Although some Oregon farmers make claims about their impossibly tight circumstances, as they compete in global markets and deal with competition across state lines, I believe my family's story can serve as a reality check.

Tax Fairness Oregon urges you to reject the HB1507A-17. The benefits to the farmers' workers will monumentally outweigh the increase in business' expenditures caused by an increase in Oregon's minimum wage. I wish today's farmers could just talk with my Dad.