



To: House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness  
From: William H. Whitaker, for the Oregon Rural Action Board of Directors  
RE: Statement of Support for H.B. 4004  
Date: February 6, 2018

Chairman Paul Evans and members of the House Committee on Veterans and Emergency Preparedness: My name is William Whitaker. I am speaking on behalf of the board and staff of Oregon Rural Action, a member based organization addressing issues important to residents of eastern Oregon. Thank you for this opportunity to explain why we strongly support the enactment of H.B.4004.

The production boom in the Bakken oil fields of North Dakota has resulted in an explosion of oil train traffic throughout the United States. Since July 2013 there have been at least fourteen major derailments of oil trains resulting in fires, property damage and deaths.

Since September 2012, oil train traffic through the Columbia Gorge has gone from zero to a high of 60 million gallons per week. On June 3, 2016, a sixteen-car oil train derailment in Mosier, Oregon, spilled 42,000 gallons of oil, fouling Mosier's sewer system and igniting a fire that burned for 14 hours. We were lucky that time. Had high winds typical of a late spring day in the eastern Columbia Gorge been blowing, a much more catastrophic event would have occurred.

Oregon Rural Action believes such accidents can be prevented by keeping volatile hydrocarbons in the ground. However, as long as oil continues to be transported by train through eastern Oregon and the Columbia Gorge, it is essential that Oregon takes all possible steps to prevent oil spills, protect residents and the environment, and ensure robust emergency response planning by railroads that own or operate high hazard train routes in our state.

Oregon Rural Action believes that railroads that operate high hazard train routes must be required to demonstrate proof of financial responsibility for accidents that may occur and demonstrate capacity to respond to accidents. Creation of a High Hazard Train Route Oil Spill Prevention Fund is an important, albeit insufficient, response to this danger. We also support creating detailed maps of high hazard train routes and plans involving local residents in identifying emergency response resources and those responsible for responding to emergencies.

Oregon Rural Action strongly supports the enactment of H.B. 4004. Thank you.