House Concurrent Resolution 31

Sponsored by Representative WILDE, Senator MANNING JR, Representatives CATE, GRAYBER

SUMMARY

The following summary is not prepared by the sponsors of the measure and is not a part of the body thereof subject to consideration by the Legislative Assembly. It is an editor's brief statement of the essential features of the measure as introduced.

Commends Idanha-Detroit Rural Fire Protection District and other first responders for their heroic actions in fighting Santiam Fire.

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Whereas on August 16, 2020, thunderstorms moved across the State of Oregon and lightning ignited multiple wildfires, including the Beachie Creek Fire, the Lionshead Fire and the P-515 Fire; and

Whereas on September 7, powerful winds caused the wildfires to explode in size and merge into the Santiam Fire, a situation exacerbated by multiple spot fires caused by downed power lines; and

Whereas in the early morning hours of September 8, the Santiam Fire raced westward down the Santiam Canyon, quickly endangering many communities, including Idanha and Detroit; and

Whereas firefighters across the Santiam Valley tirelessly and selflessly worked to save lives and homes, including those with the Idanha-Detroit Rural Fire Protection District (RFPD); and

Whereas Idanha and Detroit were urgently evacuated and fire crews were ordered to fall back in the face of the catastrophic and unpredictable wind-whipped wildfire; and

Whereas when all their escape routes were cut off, a small team of Idanha-Detroit RFPD firefighters were backed up to the shore of Detroit Lake at the Mongold boat launch, where they made a desperate last-ditch stand against the raging fire and fought to save the lives of more than 70 evacuees; and

Whereas Captain Joe Darby and volunteer firefighter Ethan Sitton managed the safety zone, organized supplies, made escape preparations and worked to keep the evacuees calm and safe; and

Whereas Sitton later said of their predicament, “no matter how bleak it all looked or how hard it was to operate ... really what was on our mind was survival and survival of our evacuees”; and

Whereas a momentary wind shift provided the firefighters a brief opening to evacuate from Mongold, and with help from other agencies they seized the opportunity, bravely leading a convoy out of the area through back roads surrounded by flames; and

Whereas no lives were lost in the action that has come to be known as the “Mongold Stand”; and

Whereas Chief Will Ewing, Deputy Chief Damon Faust and Chief Kyle McMann were fearless and calm in command, recognizing the threat to their communities and developing tactics and strategies to keep their crews motivated and effective; and

Whereas senior firefighter Ruben Arellano, who was thrust into a line leadership position and showed remarkable composure and bravery in the most challenging circumstances, later said, “this is what we signed up for ... at the end of day you have a job to do”; and

NOTE: Matter in boldfaced type in an amended section is new; matter [italic and bracketed] is existing law to be omitted.

New sections are in boldfaced type.

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Whereas other volunteers who made sacrifices and put their lives on the line for their communities include senior medic Jillian Gempel, firefighter Ron Harris, Lieutenant Laura Harris and recruit Roberto Delamontaigne; and

Whereas Idanha-Detroit RFPD firefighters signed on for this work to help the people they care about while giving back to the places they call home; and

Whereas in the face of unimaginable adversity, the firefighters of the Idanha-Detroit RFPD saved many lives with their courage, determination and resourcefulness; and

Whereas when their communities needed them most, the Idanha-Detroit RFPD stood strong; and

Whereas the Santiam Fire was ultimately one of the most destructive wildfires in the history of the State of Oregon; and

Whereas in the aftermath of the wildfire, Detroit and Idanha residents have begun rebuilding efforts in their communities, which suffered horrific destruction; now, therefore,

Be It Resolved by the Legislative Assembly of the State of Oregon:

That we, the members of the Eighty-first Legislative Assembly, recognize and honor the actions of the firefighters of the Idanha-Detroit Rural Fire Protection District, who battled the Santiam Fire and saved many lives; and be it further

Resolved, That we express our gratitude to all the public and private entities and first responders who fought the Santiam Fire with heroism and great determination; and be it further

Resolved, That we extend our sympathy and condolences to the many Oregonians who suffered unimaginable loss as a result of the Santiam Fire, and we declare our full support for the massive rebuilding effort in the affected communities.