



Representative Bobby Levy

Serving Umatilla, Union & Wallowa Counties

Public Testimony on HB 2358.

Chair Holvey, Vice-Chairs Bonham and Grayber, and members of the committee, my name is Bobby Levy and I represent House District 58, Umatilla, Union, and Wallowa Counties.

Throughout my career, I have worked at food processing plants, sold insurance, was a teacher and a professor, a farmer, a rancher, a mother and a grandmother. As an onion and potato farmer, a sheep rancher, a guardian dog breeder, and a timber producer, I understand the hard work, the obstacles, the challenges, and rewards of working in agriculture. Oftentimes, feeding Oregon is a thankless job. Lambing doesn't abide by the 9-5 work week, farming doesn't lend itself to a "work from home" situation, and keeping predators or pests away from your livestock and crops is a full-time job, even on labor-day weekend. But the biggest obstacle to working in the agriculture industry is that the cost of producing our commodities is more than we get paid for it.

As a representative for HD58, I represent the hardworking Oregonians who work in the agriculture industry. Umatilla, Union, and Wallowa counties don't have the types of industry that Eugene or Portland have. Unlike communities that have Nike or Intel, HD58 has agriculture. Umatilla County, whose biggest city is Hermiston with 17,423 residents, produces fruits and processes foods, with nearly 10% of the population working in agriculture. Union County, whose biggest city is La Grande with 13,310, boasts an economy founded on timber and grain crops, that help build our homes and feed the animals we consume. Wallowa County, whose biggest city is Enterprise with 2,033 residents, is prime for ranching and timber, where 14% of the county works in our natural resource-based industries. Whereas our neighbors to the west produce the technology we use or the clothes we wear, my corner of the state helps produce the food we eat and the materials for our homes. Every industry in Oregon is important and needs to be treated as such.

However, the cumulative effect of the bills this session on our agriculture industry will directly cause the destruction of our natural resource-based state. HB 2674 leads to a 3% tax on farm equipment tires and 3.5% tax on renting farm equipment. HB 3305 prohibits the state of Oregon from selling petroleum diesel by 2028, giving farmers and ranchers less than 7 years to sell and invest in brand new equipment. SB 387 limits the amount of water available for livestock to 5,000 gallons a day, which is not sufficient enough water for even 500 head of cattle. HB 2379 is a 5% severance tax on timber harvesters. In the past 5 months, the cost of diesel has gone from \$2.37 on November 2nd to \$3.07 this month. The costs of producing will continue to rise and our Oregon lawmakers are only exacerbating this problem.

But HB 2358 is different. Instead of increasing taxes on production or regulating what type of equipment farmers are allowed to use, HB 2358 will directly affect who is hired, how many

employees an operation has, and the amount of money employees will take home. Instead of putting more money in ag-workers pockets, HB 2358 will have the opposite effect. Farmers and ranchers are not capable of paying the rates over-time wages require, so instead they will only offer their employees a shortened work week. Therefore, instead of employees taking in more than 40 hours of wages each week, they will be taking home roughly 35 hours. Employers will hire more workers and pay them less than they normally would. Because this industry cannot take additional costs, they will find a way to avoid the over-time pay and this will only hurt the workers you're trying to help with this legislation.

I oppose HB 2358, not because we want to punish agriculture workers, but because we understand that reality differs from our ideals. The reality is that our farming communities cannot afford this cost. And the reality is that our farm workers will suffer the consequences.

Representative Bobby Levy, HD58

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bobby Levy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.