

My name is Lesley Tamura and I am a 4th generation pear grower in Hood River County. I have been directly involved in this issue from the beginning: I am part of the coalition of ag producers and organizations, I have led farm tours with legislators, I have attended every legislative workgroup meeting held over the past 6 months, and I have openly shared information about my own operation, including our financials, in order to help lawmakers understand why we are fighting for a policy that allows for compromise and flexibility.

There are 2 fundamental truths here: Farmworkers are a critical part of our industry and deserve to be recognized as such – AND – most farms cannot afford to pay an overtime rate at a 40-hour threshold and could very easily go out of business. The way that you reconcile those truths is with a policy that allows for genuine and permanent compromise. Legislators say that growers and ranchers are not responsible for the wrongs done in the past, but you are about to sacrifice us in a poor attempt to right those wrongs.

We have never asked for tax credits. This so-called “help” you offer is nothing more than a way for legislators to make themselves feel better about damaging the entire ag industry. You cannot have it both ways: you cannot pass legislation that puts us out of business AND claim to be the white knights riding in to save us with your futile tax credits. Democratic lawmakers do not get to act like they are the heroes of this story when you have offered no genuine compromise. We want a sustainable business model that allows us to survive, not a temporary band-aid. A 40-hour threshold with no seasonal exemption is not a sustainable model for the ag community.

My family is Japanese-American, and my great-grandparents and grandparents were put in internment camps during World War II. Through some smart choices and good luck, they still managed to keep their land and return to it after being released. Many Japanese-Americans were not so fortunate; their land was stolen while they were imprisoned and they had nothing to come back to. Through what was arguably the worst period of history, my family was able to keep their orchard. And here I am, staring down the very real possibility of losing that very same orchard – not because of such large-scale challenges as world war or racist prison camps, but simply because Oregon’s Democrat lawmakers think they know better than farmers how our industry works and what we need to survive. We don’t usually get much interest from those outside of agriculture in what we do or why we do it, but what we do get is plenty of free advice from the uninformed about how to do our jobs, treat our workers, bring in our crops, sell our commodities, and provide for our families. The blatant arrogance, condescension, and self-righteous attitudes shown by many legislators throughout this entire process have been disgusting to witness. To the Democrats in the House and Senate: Why do you have such contempt for the farmers and ranchers of this state? If your goal in passing this legislation is to further widen the urban-rural divide happening across this country and show rural Oregonians that they do not matter, then you have achieved it.

Throughout this process we have asked for the Democrats in office to see us as partners in building an overtime policy, but instead we have been treated like nothing more than an obstacle to be overpowered. We begged and pleaded to help craft an overtime policy with you, to share our ideas about how to create a fair policy that allows us to survive, but you said that you knew better. We have been steamrolled, disrespected, disregarded, and condescended to. We have been called racists, slave owners, and white supremacists, sometimes by our own legislators. Despite this, we continued to engage in the political process because we know what’s at stake. We never left the negotiating table, and we are here today to tell you that if you do not want to move forward with a meaningful compromise, then vote no on this bill and let us take our chances outside of the legislature.

To our lawmakers: You have the power and the information to make the right choice. No one is forcing you to move forward with a bill that will kill the ag industry. Do not be fooled: temporary tax credits will do nothing to help us, and by voting in favor of this bill you WILL be responsible for putting family farms out of business.