

Submitter: Haseeb Shojai

On Behalf
Of:

Committee: House Committee On Emergency Management, General
Government, and Veterans

Measure: HB2426

RE: HB 2426 – Consumer Choice at the Pump

Chair Grayber, Vice-Chairs Lewis and Tran, and members of the Committee,

My name is Haseeb Shojai, and I own and operate gas stations in Central Oregon – in Bend, Madras, Prineville and Metolius.

I'm a first-generation Oregonian. I moved here from Afghanistan in 2004. When I came to the United States I had the opportunity to work hard and with the help of a friend I was able to start my first business in 2007. Things have changed a lot since then for me personally and for my career. I appreciate the opportunity I was given in the United States and especially in Oregon to be a successful entrepreneur.

As a business owner and as an operator of gas stations, the last three years have been increasingly challenging. From the pandemic, to intense wildfire smoke, to a seismic shift in employment, our ability to operate normally is no longer an option. Wildfires have been a factor in operating our business in the summer months, when it is hard for our gas attendants to stay for long periods outside in smoke and in heat. Sometimes in the middle of the winter when it is 20 degrees, it is again really difficult for our employees to stay outside for a 6- to 8-hour shift.

Because we don't have enough workers, we have not had a set schedule of when we are open for business, or when we can have a gas attendant on duty to help our customers. We don't know if we can stay open tomorrow or the next day or even next week due to the labor shortage. Our team members are overworked and exhausted. We offer very competitive wages in line with major box stores and national retailers – we are not skimping on anything to retain and hire employees – but, unfortunately, it has been really, really difficult to find help.

There is no shortage of gasoline. The infrastructure exists for everyone in Oregon to be able to get gas in a timely manner. What lacks is the labor that transfers the gas from one tank to another tank with the push of about three buttons. Self-service has worked not just in other states but also in other countries. The infrastructure exists for it to be sustainable and for it to be safe in Oregon. We can pump our own diesel but we cannot pump our own gas. In smaller counties, people can get self-serve gasoline, but not in larger counties.

I testified to legislators about this same problem last year, and I can tell you the situation is even more dire now. We still do not see a light at the end of the tunnel. The labor shortage will be a problem for an extended period of time. It's possible it will never improve.

The shortage of labor has not only made it difficult to operate but at times also creates unsafe and difficult situations for the only gas attendant at the station. Customers are becoming impatient and the gas attendants have to work a lot more harder to cater to customer needs. The different rules in different counties have also created confusion for the customers, as they only have knowledge of the rules for their own county and specifically the town where they live and get gas. Once they are traveling within Oregon, they expect the same rules across Oregon, but they are surprised when they find out that not all counties have the same regulations for fuel dispensing. People from Deschutes County will wait a very long time in their vehicles for an attendant if they are in Crook County, and people from Crook County will get out of their vehicle to pump their own gas if they are in Deschutes County. It creates confusion for the attendants and customers.

A lot of times we have to shut down half the station because the attendant cannot attend to all the pumps. We have to put orange cones in front of the pumps and the customers are made to wait longer for the open pumps with an attendant to get fuel. It will be a lot more efficient and a lot more effective if half of the pumps are used for self-service.

More and more customers show interest in pumping their own gas because it's faster