**League of Women Voters of Deschutes County Interview with Congressman Cliff Bentz, of Oregon’s 2nd Congressional District**

**May 7, 2021, 12 noon PT**

**Carol Loesche, Mimi Alkire, Congressman Bentz, and Nick Strader from his Oregon Staff**

**INTRODUCTIONS**

LWVDC President, Carol Loesche, and Vice President, Mimi Alkire, met virtually with Congressman Cliff Bentz on May 7. He was in his office, surrounded by overfull bookshelves. After introductions all around, the Congressman asked if he could start the interveiw by asking us a question: “What books are you reading?” Both of us being avid readers, that was dangerous territory – the danger being that we might not be able to change the subject back to our actual interview questions!!! We shared with him the Freedom Readers upcoming books, and then he grabbed and held up, so we could see, the books he is currently reading:

*Kings of Crypto: One Startup’s Question to Take Cryptocurrency Out of Silicon Valley and Onto Wall Street, by Jeff John Roberts*

*Why I Stand, by Burgess Owens*

*Madison’s Metronome, Greg Weiner*

*The Congressional Experience: A View from the Hill, by David E. Price*

*And he listed several periodicals, including Foreign Affairs Magazine, New York Review of Books, Commentary Magazine.*

Then he asked us to please read**The Hundred-year Marathon: China’s Secret Strategy to Replace America as the Global Superpower****,** by Michael Pillsbury. (This suggestion is now on our Freedom Readers “waiting list.”)

We spent a few more minutes on personal topics, during which Congressman Bentz told us he runs 6 miles every other day. He ran the Portland Marathon several times, and even though he beat his wife’s time by 7 minutes, SHE was the one who qualified for Boston Marathon in 2011. But he got to go watch her run, standing on the very spot that the bomb went off in Boston 2 years later.

**THE INTERVIEW BEGINS… THANK YOU!**

Carol expressed our thanks to Congressman Bentz for being responsive to our interview request. On behalf of League of Women Voters of Rogue Valley, Carol thanked Congressman Bentz for his recent visits around the state, including to Jackson County where he looked into the challenges of the recovery from the Almeda Wildfire. He appreciated their comments and said he is continuing to work on that issue. He had just finished a phone call with Deschutes County Commissioner Phil Chang regarding preparation for the upcoming fire season which is predicted to be intense.

The Rogue Valley League also wanted us to thank him for his words of support for healthcare workers and their efforts to keep us safe during the pandemic—specifically for encouraging people to get vaccinated and otherwise setting a good example for what’s needed to conquer the virus, such as wearing a mask.

**Q: Would you be open to doing a public service announcement aimed at the more rural parts of Oregon that are vaccine-reluctant?**

*If the congressman is asked if there is anything else I’d like to say, he tries to end all public remarks with “Get vaccinated!” To us he said, “This issue should not be political.” Each person should consult their doctor about vaccinations and is sure they would be told to get it done. He would consider doing a public service announcement but would want to consult his staff.*

*Congressman Bentz’s mother had polio as a child. After watching his mother suffer throughout her life from the excrutiating complications and eventually succumb to her illness, he feels supporting vaccinations is a pretty easy choice for him!*

**Q: HR 5010, State-based Universal Healthcare Act, would be very helpful to Oregon which has a Joint Task Force on Universal Health Care and plans to submit waiver requests to Centers for Medicaid & Medicare. Would Congressman Bentz support H.R. 5010, by Congressman Bo Khana?**

*At the time of this interview, Congressman Bentz didn’t know anything about the bill. He said he would look into it. He feels fortunate to have a few of Walden’s staff members on his team, who have memory of the many years Congressman Walden represented CD2. He did say, “The challenge with government-run healthcare is how do we get it done?” With a $3trillion budget he was hesitant to comment without sufficient background information. As a hospital lawyer in Oregon, the congressman represented both doctors and hospitals. He feels that government-run healthcare presents lots of challenges, as indicated by the issues we face with veterans healthcare system.*

*On healthcare, in general, he told us about an anti-trust meeting he attended last week on Big Pharma. He was amazed that there was almost total agreement between the two parties on the issue of prescription drug prices.*

**Q: Are you advocating or lobbying for any specific legislative measures relating to addressing the climate crisis and furthering environmental justice?**

*Yes, he is advocating for talking about. “There is no doubt that the people in my district recognize that the climate is changing… it is warmer, drier and water is more dear. The question is what to do”? He takes climate issues seriously. As an Oregon Senator, he went to Toronto to learn more about cap-and-trade. He was the only representative on the trip from Oregon. He came back with more information and interest. He read several books about climate change and interviewed people across the nation on his radio show about climate. He put together a PowerPoint to present at local meetings in farming communities and with cattlemen’s associations. He presented facts that people could not set aside. He started with a question: “Do you know what the Earth’s population was the year I was born? (2.5 billion) Do you know what it is now? (7.5 billion) Just in my lifetime, there are 5 billion more people are on the planet!” When he presented just facts that his constituents could not refute, they listened and believed. Congressman Bentz expressed his belief that people can ABSOLUTELY affect climate! “But if we are going to combat the situation, we will have to involve many other countries.” When he visited China with other dignitaries on a fact-finding mission, he stayed in a high rise hotel in Shanghai. He saw that every day at 10pm all the lights went out and while everything was dark, coal barges completely filedl the river end-to-end – traveling up the river full and then returning empty before morning. He said that they saw exactly 2 birds in all of Hong Kong! He believes that we need to do whatever we can to protect our environment, but we have to work with powers across the planet.*

*Congressman Bentz works on the Natural Resource Committee and the Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Committee. He believes we have a misplaced focus on natural gas. Coal is the real culprit. He said, “We have about 30-40 years of hotter, warmer, drier, and we need to be doing whatever we can in this time to get ready for WORSE! Mitigation needs to be done SERIOUSLY! Adaptaion, Innovation, Sequestration!” (NOTE: Congressman Bentz introduced his first two pieces of legislation to plant more trees that are able to sequester more efficiently and to address the nationwide shortage of tree seedlings.)*

**Q: The League supports measures to reduce police violence and improve the transparency of policing practices.  What federal legislation or reforms can we move forward to reduce police brutality?**

*The Congressman’s brother was a police officer in Ontario, Oregon, and then a county sheriff. His brother developed a training program that was used for training officers in Salem. He planned to speak to his brother to prepare for this interveiw but did not have enough time. As a lawyer, he had some experience in this area when he was called in as a junior defense member for a police brutality case, but that was many years ago so he felt the experience might not be helpful in light of today’s issues. At this time he feels like there is room for improvement in policing across America, but he needs to take more time to research the issues, including spending some time talking to his brother.*

*On January 7 (the day after the siege), Congressman Bentz went through the gates at the Capitol and spoke to the police officers on duty that day. They were bruised, swollen, and injured, but they were at work. They told him about how outnumbered they were and how harried the situation was. We could tell, when he relayed the stories they told him about the day before, that the Congressman was personally affected.*

**Q: The 2020 election showed the many barriers that voters still face at the ballot box, especially voters of color.  Do you support restoring the Voting Rights Act by passing the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act (HR4)?**

*Congressman Bentz reported that he is not sure where the bill is in the process. He believed that HR 4 Passed in the House before Congressman Bentz was installed as a congressman. [HR 4 was introduced in the House January 4, 2021, and passed on March 3, 2021. Bentz was on in the roll call for that vote.)*

**Q: How can we know where you will be holding CD2 townhalls so that we can come out to hear from you?**

*Nick told us that the staff is working to determine the best and safest way they can set up townhalls. It has been tough for the new office to get a set up. They are considering doing more Zoom meetings so that more people can participate.*

**Q: Is there any thing else you would like to share with us?**

*Congressman Bentz wanted us to know that he recently voted for HR 1603, Farm Workforce Modernization Act. This bill amends the Immigration and Nationality Act to provide for nonimmigrant/migrant farmworkers. He believes the H-2A Guestworker Program needs to be fixed. This bill tries to balance the needs of farmers and of farmworkers.*

*Then he grabbed a notepad and asked us to repeat the titles and authors of the recent books our bookclub had read. We told him that we would be sending our Freedom Readers booklist to his office.*

[Respectfully Submitted by Carol Loesche and Mimi Alkire]