

Oregon Representatives work to clean up meth problems

by Bend Weekly News Sources

H.R. 365 passed Wednesday by a vote of 426 to 2

U.S. Congressmen Peter DeFazio (D-Springfield), Earl Blumenauer (D-Portland) and Greg Walden (R-Hood River) are helping communities across Oregon clean up methamphetamine labs and the toxic mess they leave behind.

Reps. DeFazio, Blumenauer and Walden, all members of the Congressional Caucus to Fight and Control Methamphetamine, cosponsored H.R. 365, a bill that charges the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with the development of health-based guidelines to assist state and local authorities in cleaning up former meth lab sites. The bill passed Wednesday by a vote of 426 to 2.

"Methamphetamines have devastated the lives of too many Oregonians and their families," DeFazio said. "Communities throughout Oregon and the U.S. will face untold costs in responding to the human, environmental and health consequences of this scourge for years to come. The country needs a better strategy and adequate resources to fight this growing epidemic, and this bill takes an important step toward that goal."

"Oregon has made impressive strides to prevent the abuse of methamphetamines by requiring prescriptions for pseudoephedrine and advancing the Stomp Out Meth Project, an Oregon solution for methamphetamine addiction," Blumenauer said. "The federal government needs to partner with local communities to address this epidemic. One way we can help is by having the EPA create guidelines and work with local authorities to clean up old meth labs."

"As I learned during seven town halls I held on methamphetamine throughout southern, eastern and central Oregon, from Pendleton to Paisley families and communities are being torn apart by this epidemic," Walden said. "Children and their families are subjected to toxic fumes left over from meth labs, and it's essential that we determine when it is safe to occupy the spaces where this poison has been produced. The least we can do at the federal level is help arm those engaged in this battle on the front lines with the tools and research critical to the safe and effective remediation of facilities and lands contaminated by use and production of this devastating substance."

In addition to establishing clean-up guidelines, the bill would also:

-- Direct the National Institute of Standards and Technology to consult with EPA in developing technologies to detect meth labs, emphasizing in field test kits for law enforcement.

-- Require the National Academy of Sciences to study the long-term health impacts of meth exposure on first-responders and on children taken from meth lab sites.

Methamphetamine abuse is a widespread problem in Oregon. Oregon treats more people for meth addiction per capita than any other state in the country and is consistently ranked in the top 10 states nationally for meth lab seizures, with the Drug Enforcement Agency reporting almost 200 meth labs seized in 2005.

Oregon Representatives David Wu (D-Portland) and Darlene Hooley (D-West Linn) also cosponsored the bill.