

State Representative
Cliff Bentz
House District 60

PRESS RELEASE: April 29, 2013

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Rep. Bentz's Columbia River Treaty Bill Passes House

SALEM—Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-Ontario) carried HB 3491A on the Floor of the House Thursday, where it was passed unanimously. House Bill 3491A, drafted by Rep. Bentz, directs the Governor to report to the Oregon Legislative Assembly on discussions relating to the Columbia River Treaty. Reports from the Governor are required every 90 days beginning this September.

The Columbia River Treaty is an agreement between the United States and Canada under which Canada constructed and operates three dams in Canada for power generation and flood control and under which the U.S. constructed and operates a dam in Montana for the same purpose. The U.S. and Canada share the power benefits produced from Canadian water storage.

December 31st of 2013, a critical date for the Columbia River Treaty is fast approaching. If Canada or the U.S. decided to withdraw from the Treaty, a 10-year notice of such termination could be given by either party in 2014.

HB 3491A provides the legislature with the opportunity to follow and monitor the negotiations and their impact on Oregon.

“The Columbia River Treaty is hugely important to Oregon,” Rep. Bentz said. “Terminated, renegotiated, or left as is, there are significant and direct consequences for our state. Changes in responsibility for flood control, the timing of the flow of water to Oregon, and many other important issues are all on the negotiating table. It is absolutely essential that Oregon fully engage in these discussions and decisions regarding the Columbia River Treaty.”

Rep. Bentz previously urged his colleagues in the House to support HB 3491A when it was heard in his House Committee on Energy and Environment on April 16th. It passed out of Committee unanimously.

“The dams in the Columbia River Basin (made possible by the Treaty) have saved Portland from devastating floods and resulting loss of life. However, allocation of the responsibility for flood control could damage small towns such as Richland, Halfway, and Ontario. Consequences such as these, not to mention the cost of “new” stored water, make this process meaningful to much of our state. We must be involved and invested in this process.”

Rep. Bentz is, and has been for the past five years, a Legislatively-appointed member of the Legislative Council on River Governance, which meets annually for two days to discuss multi-state water issues. The Columbia River Treaty has been at the top of the list of topics of concern in the last several LCRG conferences and will be there again when the Council meets in Oregon this year.

HB 3491A now moves to the Oregon Senate.

(See map of Columbia River Basin below)

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