

This Republican agrees with Merkley about pipeline project: Guest opinion



(Kinder Morgan)

The author agrees with Sen. Merkley that there's "a better way to create jobs than to let a Canadian company put a 229-mile fracked gas pipeline across Oregon along with an extremely hazardous liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in an earthquake and tsunami zone here in Coos Bay."

By **Guest Columnist**

By Bill McCaffree

I'm a lifelong union electrician and a Republican, and I didn't vote for U.S. Sen. Jeff Merkley. But Merkley's announcement opposing the proposed fracked gas pipeline and export terminal at Coos Bay made a whole lot of sense to me.

I was born in Coos County and have lived on Oregon's south coast my whole life. My dad was an electrician and local president of a building and construction trades union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW). I've had the privilege to follow in his footsteps and served as the local IBEW president myself for six years.

Everyone who works in the building and construction trades wants to build things that benefit communities and don't cause harm.

That's why I agree with Sen. Merkley that there is a better way to create jobs than to let a Canadian company put a 229-mile fracked gas pipeline across Oregon along with an extremely hazardous liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal in an earthquake and tsunami zone here in Coos Bay.

What is anticipated to be one of the world's biggest earthquakes in history is already hundreds of years overdue. The Oregon Department of Geology and Mineral Industries recently raised serious concerns about the LNG project's earthquake safety analysis. Why would we let an out-of-state company add a huge miles-wide explosive fire danger to our rural areas just so they can make a quick buck?

The pipeline would cross the land and affect the property values of hundreds of Oregon landowners, with the threat of eminent domain held over their head if they don't accept a small, one-time payment from the company.

Since I was a kid, there have been jobs here in Coos County from fishing, clamming, and oyster farming. What would happen to those jobs when the bay is disturbed by construction and operation of this export terminal?

Some people point to the new jobs that would be created in the short run, but I know from experience that the great majority of the work would be done by people who come from outside the area. We would be stuck with negative impacts and costs, while most of the benefits go back to their home communities.

I agree with Sen. Merkley that the price of climate disruption "will go up exponentially if we don't rapidly transition from fossil fuels to clean and renewable sources." Renewable energy sources are creating jobs at a rate 12 times faster than the rest of the U.S. economy.

As Sen. Merkley said, there is a better way to create jobs for the long-term by investing "in building the enormous backlog of infrastructure projects that will improve our state and nation, not damage it. We can energize our construction economy by building desperately needed drinking and wastewater systems; improved bridges, roads, docks, jetties and rail; electric lines; and rural broadband."

It was great to see Sen. Merkley speak out for creating jobs the right way. I hope Gov. Kate Brown and our other elected officials will do the same.

Bill McCaffree is a recently retired union electrician. He lives in Coos County.