

April 4, 2021

Chairman Jeff Golden
Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Wildfire Recovery.
Oregon Senate
Salem, OR

Dear Senator Golden,

We write to urge you to support SB 832 and to wind down mink farming in our state in rapid fashion.

In 1989, our daughter entered the Miss Oregon pageant, and as expected, she did remarkably well. She's a multi-talented person, beautiful inside and out, and at that time of the competition, she was attending the University of Oregon. She won the pageant in Lane County and competed statewide.

During the pageant, she talked about her keen appreciation and love of animals. The organizers knew they had to confront a sticky question with her: would she accept the fur coat that had been the material prize associated with the competition, offered by an Oregon-based fur seller that had been a major sponsor?

Though she wanted more than anything to compete for the title of Miss America, she told organizers in a private meeting prior to announcing the winner, that could not fathom the idea of accepting the coat given her beliefs that animal cruelty is wrong. She knew then, and we all know now, that killing animals for fur is entirely unnecessary. There are so many other fabrics we now use to make coats and other outdoor clothing. It's archaic and inhumane, and when you understand how animals suffer on mink farms and otherwise, it's an obvious moral choice.

Even if mink were not so susceptible to COVID-19 and did not pose such a threat to public health, it would not be a difficult question of policy to end mink farming. These are wild animals, solitary animals, semiaquatic animals. They don't belong bunched together in small cages and killed by neck-breaking or electrocution or gassing to make something we can do without.

Our daughter was ahead of her time three decades ago in taking a public stand against cruelty, even though it came with a measure of sacrifice. Her dream of winning the pageant was dashed. But I am so proud of her because she stood for something, honored her values, and reminded us of what's truly important in our society. She garnered national media attention for her choice. People throughout Oregon and the nation wrote to her and commended her on her principled stand. We knew at that point what the trajectory of this industry was in our society.

You have an easy call on SB 32. Mink farming is an activity in steep decline, with a shriveling market. Major fashion houses and retailers now foreswear the use of fur. The company that sponsored the pageant in 1989 is now out of business. When you add the COVID-19 threat posed by mink farms, I'm at a loss to understand what the rationale for the status quo is.

When Oregon outlawed dogfighting and cockfighting, it put some people out of business. But some businesses must go to make way for businesses and hobbies more aligned with our values. Staged animal fighting is corrosive to a civil society, but those barbaric practices are not a major threat to extend the pandemic. Just as you would vote to outlaw those practices, were they on the docket for consideration, you should vote to end mink farming.

Thank you for your attention, and please know that my entire Oregon family supports SB 832 and learned a great deal from our daughter on this topic.

Sincerely yours,
David and Patty Verch
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