

Submitter: Ronald Rhew
On Behalf Of:
Committee: Senate Committee On Rules
Measure, Appointment or Topic: SJR28

Testimony for Senate Joint Resolution 28

To: Chairman Jama, and members of the rules committee

Thank you to the chair and members of the rules committee for this opportunity to submit comments on behalf of Senate Joint Resolution 28, the Rights to a Healthy Environment. My name is Ronald Rhew, and I reside in Troutdale, Oregon. I am a retired environmental professional, having worked over 30 years in this field, most of that in Oregon, concentrating on implementing the Federal endangered species act, but more importantly for this advocacy, a grandfather of 3 dear grandchildren. I am and remain very concerned for their future, which, of course, is our responsibility, and I believe that we are seriously failing them on a number of fronts, chief among them, allowing them livable environmental conditions; clean air, water, and a healthy thriving environment.

President Franklin Roosevelt said in his 1944 State of the Union address, “a necessitous man is not a free man” regarding economic conditions in the United States at that time. Presently, conditions for the oppressed have not only failed to improve significantly, but now extend to whether a normal thriving healthy life is possible for many, given deteriorating environmental conditions across our state and indeed the planet. This failure, our failure, extends to our children, grandchildren, and future generations. This is not a condition I can abide and stand idly by while it happens, which is why I am speaking out. What I find particularly perplexing is that the cause is the same now as it was then, unmitigated greed. As the excellent series of articles produced by the Oregonian and Pro-Publica “Polluted By Money” <https://projects.oregonlive.com/polluted-by-money/> points out, this greed has largely captured Oregon’s government.

The result, much as it was in the 1940’s and before, is government that works, not so much for the people that it is supposed to represent and protect, but for well moneyed interests and corporations, to the detriment of working folks, children, and future generations. President Roosevelt termed this segment of society “economic royalists”, and welcomed their disdain for his policies. How I wish (boy do I wish) his spirit was more evident in today’s politics. Maybe then we would not have drinking water so polluted by nitrates that it is unhealthy for people residing over large areas of the state and growing. Maybe then, we would be more concerned for growing forests, particularly publicly-held forests, for the carbon that they capture, clean air that they create, and clean water that they provide, including long-term economic benefits to folks who work in them. Maybe then, we would restore our soils, and promote work with family farms to regenerate our farmlands. It pains me to write these words, even knowing that they are true and easily documented. However, according to Spanish philosopher, George Santayana “those who cannot remember

the past are condemned to repeat it”, or, in the words of Mark Twain, “history doesn’t repeat itself, but it often rhymes”.

Before us now, with this referral, is an opportunity, maybe not to turn all of this around, but to provide a floor that gives us a base to place our societal ladder upon, and a compassionate path, to begin the climb out. Nothing can be more necessitous than being deprived of an environment that supports life, nothing can be as beautiful as what nature creates; I am constantly reminded and thankful for its beauty.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important legislation, and for bringing it forward.

Regards, Ronald Rhew