

April 1, 2025

House Committee on Judiciary

Fred Cuozzo, Eagle Point, OR -- In Opposition to HB 3917

Chair Kropf and members of the Committee, my name is Fred Cuozzo. I am a former Medford firefighter, retired airline transport pilot and a Vietnam veteran. To say I've been through some tough and harrowing experiences in my lifetime, would be an understatement. I never imagined experiencing such a sense of loss at this point in my life.

I live on 20 acres in Eagle Point that were once irrigated green fields and had multiple structures on the property with 2 acres of mature landscaping. One of my homes on the property was built in 1928 and I spent 5 years restoring it. It was full of priceless antiques and family memorabilia. I planted all along the highway 42 years ago to create a green wall for my oasis. All are gone now. In total I lost 6 structures and now I see mainly black trees, if I see any at all.

The night of the fires, the main burn was about 10 miles away. I started to notice burnt leaves around, so I got in my pickup and drove up the highway. I saw a firetruck up ahead with four big fires by the road. It was getting increasingly smokey and by the morning, the wind was blowing hard and tons of smoke was pouring through. I got in my golf cart and went up the driveway. I saw a solid lineup of cars and trailers going down the main road. The fire was here and it was roaring like a jet engine. It had clearly crossed the road and I could now see one of my houses burning. On the road I could see a power pole down and burning, lighting a fuse into blackberry bushes.

No one came and told me, no sheriff, nothing. I had no idea it was that close. At this point, I started to take some video and took off down the road. There was no traffic anymore, but there was a solid fire burning across the highway. Even though it was day, it was pitch dark and I couldn't see past the hood of my truck. My truck went off the road. I was surrounded by burning blackberry bushes. I kept thinking "you shouldn't have done this Fred" -- as the truck got hotter and hotter and I worried I'd roll over. I was completely trapped by fire. Somehow, I was able to back up back onto the road. Luckily, with a sudden wind shift, I could see again. I accelerated out of it. My legs were shaking involuntarily, and I started to cry. My body knew it nearly escaped death. In Vietnam, I was shot down in a helicopter and wounded, and this brush felt as intense.

In the aftermath, it took me 7 months to get back in, to redo the well, rebuild all the fencing, clear burned buildings and trees. It's all still so desolate and it makes me feel depressed to this day. I'll see a picture of my old property or the gigantic barn I built all by myself, and it makes me sick that it's all gone.

In 2023, after Pacific Power was found guilty of being "grossly negligent" and reckless, the damage portion of the trial started on January 9th of last year, roughly 10 survivors at a time, and the courts assessed our losses. None of us has seen a dime yet.

Pacific Power sent their appraisers always devaluing my property by easily \$300,000 or more. They don't want to pay for their devastating mistakes, that is clear. Even after all this time thinking about it and talking about it, it still causes me pain. Please don't allow a multi-billion-dollar corporation to continue harming Oregonians. It's time they're held accountable. We are all here today, not just for ourselves, but for the next group of wildfire victims. They deserve justice too.

I urge you to vote **NO on HB 3917**