

Washington then and now

On May 18 of this year, I joined OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone and OAN Government Relations Committee Chairman Josh Zielinski on a trip to Washington, D.C. We visited with the Oregon congressional delegation, officials with various congressional committees, and Department of Agriculture personnel.

The OAN has cultivated relationships with these folks over the years. The annual trip to D.C. is designed to enhance those relationships and ensure that the OAN continues to be an important voice in the offices of our elected representatives and with the federal agency that deals with horticultural issues.

Rather than showing up with our hand out, we offer to partner with legislators and their staff, providing insight and education on issues such as pests and diseases, trade, labor, immigration and taxes. Most of the feedback we received was positive on the issues, with the exception of immigration. That issue has become quite toxic on both sides of the aisle and probably will not be addressed in the near term.

I think we accomplished what we set out to do: making sure our voice is heard.

While there, I couldn't help but compare Washington today to my last visit nearly 30 years ago. The biggest change I noticed was in scale. Washington has grown. The business of government today needs a lot of infrastructure and people. All the activity there made my head spin.

I also observed that some of the people involved in the government are not cognizant of the world outside the "beltway" and believe that the center of the universe is Washington, D.C. Do you remember that recession we had starting in 2008 — the one that we are still slogging our way out of? One Washington insider mentioned that most in Washington didn't know it happened,

with all the stimulus money flowing around town. It seems that our government, regardless of party affiliation, has become a bit disconnected with its citizens.

During my first visit to Washington, the federal government was spending \$1.5 trillion annually. In 2015, the federal government is expected to spend \$3.9 trillion. That's a 153 percent increase in the size of the budget.

Over the years, the federal government has continued to consume about 21 percent of the U.S. gross domestic product. That's 21 cents out of every dollar of the total goods and services produced in the country. The question is, is that money being spent as wisely as it would be if more was left in the hands of the people who produced the goods or services? They could invest in their businesses, creating more jobs and more GDP. We need some government, but how much is enough?

As I look forward to the celebration of the founding of our great nation, I realize that our founders gave us the means to decide how much government we need and want. They were fed up with too much government courtesy of the King of England. In the words of Abraham Lincoln, the founders decided to form a "government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

Ultimately, we get to decide how much government we want, but it takes getting informed and involved so that you can engage and debate others about your convictions.

I hope you all have a wonderful Fourth of July, and go out and celebrate our great country. ☺



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