

Representative Peter DeFazio covered a wide range of topics, both national and local, in his briefing to Springfield City Club on August 22.

He described the current Congress as an exercise in frustration. The House of Representatives is working with some efficiency, and passing legislation, only to have it completely stalled in the Senate, where Sen. McConnell, the Majority leader, is interested only in appointing extreme conservative judges, not doing the regular work of the Senate.



Proposed construction of an extensive border wall drew much of the Representative's ire. He observed that in the recent trial of Pablo Guzman, a leader of the Mexican cartels, it became clear that the rush of drugs into the country was NOT through illegal crossing at remote locations. The drug dealers admitted that almost all their traffic moves either through legal ports of entry or by boat. Only a small fraction of the truck traffic across the border is examined in detail, because there are simply not enough resources. The cartels don't worry about losing a shipment or two, since they move such massive amounts in false compartments in trailers and trucks. Perhaps to illustrate the point, recently a large shipment of cocaine was discovered in Washington state intermixed among boxes of bananas. Mr. DeFazio said the Coast Guard tells him they have intelligence on 80 percent of the waterborne traffic but can deal with only about 20 percent with the resources they have. He put it bluntly: "Spend billions to build a stupid wall, when sending that money to the Coast Guard would be much more effective."



On another hot domestic issue, Mr. DeFazio said the new proposed trade agreement with Mexico does nothing to element the weaknesses that cause him to oppose NAFTA when it was enacted.

When asked about Oregon legislation that would allow duplexes and more in single family zoned areas, he said he was not sure it would help the problem. What is needed, he said, is federal participation since neglect by the federal government is leading to the polarization that prevents a solution.

He was also asked about recent reports that companies were using surveillance techniques to track residents who expressed concern about the Jordan Cove LNG pipeline project. He said this is legal because of some of the provisions of the Patriot Act, passed in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks. The Patriot Act, he said authorizes surveillance clearly beyond constitutional limits.

As Chair of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee, one of his major concerns is funding for transportation. He noted one of his first experiences with the current administration was a meeting with the President where he seemed to reach agreement on a substantial infrastructure package, only to have him deny that, and reject all solutions, when the parties met again to discuss funding the program. He outlined his plan to use gas taxes to provide additional revenue. His concept would index fuel taxes based on fuel usage and the cost of construction. As fuel efficiency increases, and users spend less for fuel, the tax would increase to keep the final cost to the user at the same level. This,

he said, could generate enough revenue to provide debt service on \$40 billion in bonding for each of 13 years and would serve to fund improvements and repairs until the nation moves to a vehicle miles travelled charge.