

Statement for Introduction
Senator Ron Wyden
April 24, 2006
“Bicycle Commuters Benefit Act of 2006”

Mr. President, today I am pleased to be joined today by Senators Snowe, Collins and Cantwell in introducing the “Bicycle Commuters Benefit Act of 2006”.

I know that I am speaking for many people in this country who want to do something concrete about our nation’s dependence on oil and gas. They do not think our national energy policy is doing enough. They are eager to do things that make them feel like they can take responsibility for overcoming their dependence on oil and gas. As gas prices continue to climb this spring and summer, more and more people are going to be looking for something that they can do to free themselves from this dependency. The bill I am introducing today gives Americans more incentive to give up the cars and trucks that they drive to and from work everyday and get on their bicycles instead.

According to recent Census reports, more than 500,000 people throughout the United States commute to work by bicycle. They are freeing themselves from sitting in traffic. They are saving energy and overcoming their dependence on oil and gas. They are getting exercise; avoiding obesity and helping us keep our air clean and safe to breathe.

Yet, they are commuting by bicycle at their own expense. Their fellow employees who take mass transit to and from work have an incentive created in the *Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century* that enables their employers to pay for their bus or subway ride. This incentive is great for mass transit commuters but it discourages people from riding their bikes to and from their jobs. The *Bicycle Commuters Benefits Act of 2006* will eliminate this discrimination against bicycle commuters.

The bill extends the fringe benefit that employers can offer their employees for commuting by public transit, to those who ride their bicycles to and from their jobs. Our bill amends the tax code so that public and private employers can offer their employees a monthly benefit payment that will help them cover the costs of riding their bikes, instead of driving and parking their cars where they work. The bill also provides employers the flexibility to set their own level of benefit payment up to a specified cap amount. That way, employers and their employees can decide how much of an incentive they need to stop driving and start riding their bikes. Those who currently ride the bus and/or subway to work would also gain an extra incentive to ride their bikes. Employers can deduct the cost of their benefit payments from their taxable income. This reduces the taxes that they pay to the federal government. And, in turn, employees will receive anywhere from \$40 - \$100 per month as a non-taxable benefit, to help them pay for the costs of riding their bikes.

I think that this is a fair and modest proposal that will reward employees who ride their bikes to and from their jobs.

Our Senate bill matches HR 807 that was introduced during the first session of the 109th Congress by my fellow Oregonian, Congressman Earl Blumenauer. He has 47 co-sponsors from both sides of the aisle and every part of the United States eager to offer bicycle commuters the same incentive that I want to give commuters who take mass transit.

In addition, our bill is supported by many regional and national bicycling organizations such as Cycle Oregon, the Bicycle Transportation Alliance, the League of American Bicyclists, the Washington Area Bicyclist Association and hundreds of Capitol Hill employees who commute by bike to work everyday.

When you think about it and you look around our cities, the taxpayers have paid for millions of dollars of bike trails in all of America's urban areas and major job markets. Now, bicycle commuters will have an extra incentive to use them to commute to and from their jobs.

One week from today, we will start celebrating May as “National Bike-to-Work” month. I can’t think of any better way to commemorate this special month, than by introducing this legislation. I look forward to working with our colleagues to see this legislation pass.

I ask unanimous consent that my statement and the bill be printed in the record.