

[http://blog.oregonlive.com/breakingnews/2008/05/smith\\_seeks\\_290\\_million\\_in\\_sal.html](http://blog.oregonlive.com/breakingnews/2008/05/smith_seeks_290_million_in_sal.html)

## THE OREGONIAN

### Senator Smith seeks \$290 million in salmon disaster aid

**Posted by Charles Pope, The Oregonian  
May 01, 2008 13:33PM**

WASHINGTON - Sen. Gordon Smith, R-Ore., said Thursday that he would ask for up to \$290 million in federal disaster funding to help businesses and people affected by the collapse of the salmon fishery.

“Our fishermen would rather be out on the ocean earning a living rather than having their boats tied to the dock. I also know that they can't go a season without work,” Smith said during a conference call to announce the request.

The aid package, which Smith hopes to attach to a bill funding the Iraq war, would provide \$45 million to Oregon, \$208 million to California and \$36 million to Washington. Those are the three states affected by the decision to severely curtail salmon fishing this year. The money would be used to help commercial fishermen, salmon retailers and recreation business harmed by the shutdown.

Smith acknowledged that final details are not completed for a package that would offer federal aid to a wide swath of people and interests affected by the closure of the salmon season. He said the \$290 million figure is the top end of what might be approved.

In the House, Rep. Peter DeFazio, D-Ore., said he would push for aid as well. “This is a bigger disaster than the salmon failure in 2006,” he said in a statement.

“The number of fish returning to the Sacramento River, and therefore to the Oregon coast, is less than one-third of what it was in 2006, which means that this will be the worst commercial and recreational fisheries failure in history. Short-term assistance is critical so that folks can make boat payments, insurance payments, mortgage payments and keep food on the table,” DeFazio said.

Smith said his request is based on estimates by the governors in the three states of the financial damage caused by the closure.

Smith said he is comfortable with the estimates and that he hopes the request can move quickly.

That may be unlikely, however. President Bush has insisted that the war funding bill containing money only for Iraq and Afghanistan, suggesting that he would

veto any legislation that carried additional funding or surpassed \$108 billion.

Another problem is the difference between what Smith and the governors of Oregon, California and Washington want and the amount that federal officials say is appropriate. The Department of Commerce estimates that \$60 million disaster relief should be available compared to \$290 million sought by the three states.

Smith acknowledged the problems but said the salmon relief money should be allowed to ride on the Iraq bill because those bills often have disaster money.

“There are domestic disaster concerns that are legitimate to move forward as quickly as possible and if it isn't this vehicle we have to find another one quickly so we don't leave these fishing families vulnerable to a government decision to close this fishery,” he said.

Odd as it sounds, Smith said the decision by the federal government to declare an economic disaster is helpful because that designation triggers a federal response. By coming early, he said, it improves chances that aid will be delivered before serious economic hardship occurs.

###\_