

Town hall from 1A



JACK DAVIS/SIUSLAW NEWS

Rep. DeFazio addresses 200 constituents April 17.

“It would never go up by more than 1.5 cents per gallon per year,” DeFazio said.

The current federal gas tax of 18.4 cent per gallon has not been increased since 1993.

“Forty percent of the national highway system needs total rebuilding. 140,000 bridges need repair or replacement and we have an \$85 billion backlog in transit,” DeFazio said.

DeFazio and Sen. Bernie Sanders have also introduced a bill to change the way cost of living adjustments (COLA) are calculated for Social Security benefits.

The bill proposes to place more COLA emphasis on pharmaceuticals, food costs, rent and medical expenses.

According to DeFazio, the bill would also eliminate the cap of \$128,000 on Social Security withholding.

“If you remove that cap, Social Security actuaries project that the fund will be solvent for at least 75 years,” DeFazio said.

He clarified that the actuaries only project out 75 years.

The only other options to the

pending Social Security funding crisis, according to DeFazio, are to raise the retirement age, cut benefits or privatize the program.

During his talk, DeFazio used two charts to show the potential impact the recently withdrawn American Health

Care Act (AHCA) proposed by House Republicans and endorsed by the White House would have had.

In referencing the first chart, DeFazio said, “A 64-year-old, not eligible for Medicare, earning \$30,000 per year, would see their premium go from \$1,700 per year to \$14,600. Now how does that work?”

The second chart showed tax breaks the AHCA would have given to people earning more than \$200,000 per year. No one earning less than \$200,000 would receive a tax break.

The first question from the audience asked why President Donald Trump was willing to spend money on recent military exploits, but wanted to cut medical benefits.

DeFazio said the War Powers Act gave the president the power to use discretionary use of force not covered in the constitution, but that he had to submit a report to Congress and request further authorization.

“It is not just (Trump),” DeFazio said. “President Bill Clinton did not ask for authority for Bosnia and President

Barack Obama didn’t in Libya. This is not a new occurrence, but it is a tremendous concern.”

A question referencing a recent local Immigration Control and Enforcement (ICE) raid was asked.

“What are you doing to protect immigrant families and what do you recommend we can do?” the person asked.

DeFazio said, “We need comprehensive immigration reform in this country. We may reintroduce an immigration reform bill again, around spring or summer, when there is no one to pick the crops. Maybe then we can get a little more support. ICE, under the law, can apprehend people who are here illegally.”

An audience member asked about the current budget proposal and informed DeFazio that the ICE detainees taken from Florence last month were being held in a private prison facility near Tacoma Wash.

She said, “Incarceration and profit should not be in the same sentence.”

DeFazio said, “The Obama administration adopted a rule to say they were no longer going to enter into contracts for private prisons or detention. This administration did away with the rule. I know they are planning on more private facilities. This is a public duty, like national defense, which we also

contract out too much.

“The contractors cost a lot more than federal employees. All we are doing is subsidizing profits. We are not more efficient and we aren’t even saving money.”

One constituent said, “I’m concerned about the decimation of the EPA and the federal government’s denial of climate change. There has to be enough Republicans out there that understand that clean air and clean water are a priority.”

DeFazio said he didn’t think the EPA budget would be cut 31 percent as Trump’s budget proposed.

“People seem to forget why we have some of these rules. The Willamette River was an open sewer. We had the Cuyahoga River back east catch fire. We had black snow in Pennsylvania and killer inversions in California. I don’t think they will easily go down the path of repealing the most basic protections we have. But they are chipping away at it,” DeFazio said.

He pointed to protest marches and town hall meetings as ways to put pressure on Congress.

“(Republicans) are beginning to realize that, yes, it might have been good campaign rhetoric and it might have excited their base, but the majority of people don’t agree with (reducing the EPA),” DeFazio said. “Keep being informed and speaking out.”

An attendee said, “Would you please address all the ethics violations we hear about our current administration?”

DeFazio said that when Congress passed the conflict of interest laws, they did not include the president or vice president.

“The strict letter of conflict of interest doesn’t apply, but the constitution says that a president can’t get any benefits from a foreign entity,” DeFazio said.

He gave two examples; questioning what might be revealed in the president’s tax returns and discussing the government lease agreement with the Trump hotel in Washington, D.C.

“The Ways and Means committee has the authority to request taxes. A friend of mine, New Jersey Rep. Bill Pascrell,

moved that the committee request Trump’s taxes. The committee voted down party lines not to require the taxes. This is the first president in modern history not to release his taxes,” DeFazio said.

He continued, “Then there is the lease on the (Washington, D.C.) hotel. My committee has jurisdiction over General Services Administration (GSA) that does government buildings and leases.

“The contract that was written after the civil war says, ‘No elected official of the United States can benefit from this lease,’” DeFazio said.

After several inquiries to the GSA, DeFazio, who is the senior Democrat on the committee that is chaired by a Republican, received a startling staff briefing from the GSA.

DeFazio said, “They are no longer required to respond to us (DeFazio or his staff). This breaks with any precedent. The chairman doesn’t want to ask this question. I’m the ranking member. Throughout every administration, ranking members of committees were always given the authority to ask questions of agencies and get written responses. There is litigation pending on this by a public interest group. We’ll see where that goes.”

A question was asked about Medicare’s high pharmaceutical drug costs.

“It is outrageous that we don’t take Medicare recipients as a group and negotiate lower drug prices. Every other developed nation on earth negotiates lower drug prices for all their citizens, no matter what health-care plan. That is why you can go to Canada and buy your drugs for a fraction of the price you can get them here. We are the only country that doesn’t do that,” DeFazio said.

He added, “The excuse of the pharmaceutical companies is, ‘We need that money to develop new drugs.’ They are spending a lot more money on direct to consumer advertising.”

One participant asked about the president’s proposed budget.

“It has been rejected. I’m not aware of anybody on Capitol Hill who said, ‘I support that budget,’ including a large number of Republicans. That is not a realistic budget,” DeFazio said.

He addressed two specific items of the budget.

“(Democrats) will not defund Planned Parenthood and we are not going to support that stupid wall,” he said.

DeFazio said the wall would not stop drugs and illegal immigrants from coming into this country.

“The French built a great line before World War II called the Maginot Line. The Germans just went around it. Trump is proposing to cut the heck out of the U.S. Coast Guard (budget). The commandant of the Coast Guard said, ‘Even if you build the wall and even if the wall works, if you cut our budget, people are just going to come around on the shoreline,’” DeFazio said. “The best thing Congress could do is to pick up comprehensive immigration reform. The budget for 5,000 more ICE agents and to build the wall is absurd,” DeFazio said.

Single payer healthcare, Alzheimer’s disease treatment and liquid natural gas pipelines were additional topics discussed during the 90-minute town hall.

DeFazio may be contacted by email at www.defazio.house.gov or at 202-225-6416.

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<p>Supporters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dr. Charles and Wendy Korando—Underwriters Mayor Joe Henry for proclaiming April 7-9 “Jumpstart Your Health” weekend America’s Mattress Bicycles 101 Boys and Girls Club Chen’s Family Dish Fred Meyer Ichiban Restaurant KCST/KCFM Coast Radio Lane Bloodmobile Los Amigos Burritos Nature’s Corner Café and Market On the Coast Printing On Your Feet With a Splash Rosa’s Mexican Restaurant Siuslaw Valley Fire and Rescue The Siuslaw News Treehouse Signs Western Lane Ambulance District 	

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