

## TOWN HALL: Wide range of subjects touched on at event

*Continued from page 1*

Russia,” Wyden said. “With no explanation, this president has broken with decades of policy with respect to Russia. If Vladimir Putin had done what he has with Ukraine human rights violations and poisoning of journalists... If that had happened under a Democratic or Republican president in the past, they would have moved very aggressively, whether with sanctions or any other steps and now there is no explanation.

“Obviously this has raised concerns, and now these stories of very substantial financial relationships of Trump with the Russians. Given the fact that every presidential candidate in the last 40 years has published their tax returns... tax returns don’t lie. Tax returns tell us about allegiances with foreign governments. In terms of Russia, he might say those are more important than the American people.”

In a recent open intelligence committee meeting, Wyden was told by FBI director James Comey that he couldn’t say anything about open investigations into Russia-Trump ties. Wyden pointed out that Comey had plenty to say about open investigations 11 days before the election. Now there is going to be a bipartisan investigation with open hearings, subpoenas served, and declassification of information.

Wyden assured the audience this matter was important for people all over the state.

“I am not going to let it (possible Russian ties) get swept under the rug. In my view, American people have a right to see Michael Flynn walk into an open intelligence hearing, raise his right hand, and explain to all of you what exactly happened. In America the truth always comes out and the truth is going to come out about Russia. Count on it,” he said.

On the topic of immigration and the travel ban, Wyden

reminded the audience “that first and foremost we are a nation of immigrants.” His parents came to America after fleeing Nazi Germany.

“I think this travel ban is unconstitutional and is a thinly veiled religious test,” Wyden said.

He believes the travel ban will go all the way to the Supreme Court and will still be declared unlawful.

One audience member challenged Wyden’s characterization of the travel ban and asked whether he accepted the outcome of the election.

“Yeah, I think he (Trump) was elected president,” Wyden responded.

One audience member commented to *The Nugget* later that he was very disappointed that only one person in the audience clapped when Wyden affirmed his acceptance of the outcome of the election. He said he thought that was a sad commentary on the state of the national attitude.

In addressing the challenge regarding the travel ban, Wyden stuck to his position, but thanked the questioner for having the courage to speak out in front of an audience that was obviously on the other side of the issue and he said that this kind of dialogue is what is needed.

When asked about the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Wyden

confirmed that newly appointed head of the EPA, Scott Pruitt, is not sympathetic to the Oregon Way when it comes to the environment. He is hopeful, however, that Republican Ryan Zinke of Montana, the nominee for Secretary of the Interior, will be a reasonable steward of our natural resources.

“I want no private interests having their way with our public lands,” Wyden reiterated.

Throughout the meeting, Wyden stressed his belief that only with bipartisan actions will Congress be able to accomplish things for the good of the country. He has a strong record of successful bipartisan efforts, often working across the aisle with Republicans. He believes in finding common ground.

With the current administration “not playing within the lanes,” proffering “alternative facts,” Wyden said he fears that extraordinary damage may be done to our democracy. He pointed out, however, that here in Oregon we are leading the nation in representative government with the most town hall meetings in the country.

The Affordable Care Act is going to present a lot of tough battles, according to Wyden, especially when it comes to pre-existing conditions and lifetime limits.

“We can’t go back to the days of discrimination (against

people with pre-existing conditions),” he said.

In response to a question about fake news, Wyden said the best way to fight fake news is by supporting a free press, and then the free press must persist in its job.

Wyden addressed questions about the possible elimination of the Office of Violence Against Women (Attorney General Jeff Sessions doesn’t support it), marriage equality, women’s health (he said he’s not going to see the right taken away of a woman to see the doctor of her choice), guns (he says that 92 percent of Oregon gun owners support background checks), and infrastructure (including the energy grid and broadband).

“Never let a politician convince you that you have to give up your liberty to have your security,” Wyden warned regarding cyber security. “You have a right to policies that give you both.”

In 2006 Wyden introduced the first net neutrality bill and he gave a warning about the possibility of an information aristocracy – people of wealth offered faster and more Internet connection.

“The net has been a democratizing force,” Wyden said, and he doesn’t want to see that change.

Wyden told the audience, “If there’s one thing I want to be remembered for it is that I was a force for bringing

people together. I take a back seat to no one in trying to take a bipartisan stance.”

In response to a question after the meeting from *The Nugget* regarding what might happen to the cost of insurance whatever happens with the Affordable Care Act, Wyden replied:

“If they just repeal it, or use these executive orders, what’s going to happen is insurance companies are going to pull out, providers are going to pull out, and the risk pool will shrink. There will be mostly people who have a high degree of sickness and premiums will go up for the people both inside the exchanges and outside the exchanges because the people you have in the risk pool are largely people with a fair amount of illness.

“So to me, what would really make sense, and they’re starting to see that their ideas don’t add up, is that they drop this partisan idea and they work with those of us who have a history of being bipartisan.

“The first thing I’d say is that the individual insurance market, which is only about 6 to 7 percent of the people, is a big part of the cost increases. Let’s make the insurance market pools much bigger so you spread the cost and the risk through it to hold the cost down and be in a position to get more healthy people in the pool. “

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