

MEETINGS: Meetings scheduled with community groups

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Tuesday, April 17, 9:30 to 11 a.m., Sisters Library community room;

Tuesday, April 24, 2:30 to 4 p.m., Sisters Library community room;

Thursday, April 26, 5:30 to 7 p.m., Sisters Park & Recreation District;

Wednesday, May 2, 6:30 to 8 p.m., Sisters City Hall Council Chamber (in conjunction with Sisters VFW);

Wednesday, May 2, 6:30 to 8 p.m., Plainview, Sisters Church of the Nazarene;

Thursday, May 3, 3 to 4:30 p.m., Aspen Lakes Lodge, Brand 33;

Wednesday, May 8, 6:30 to 8 p.m., Tollgate Club House.

Several additional meetings, including a meeting with members of Sisters' Latino community, are in the process of being scheduled. People can check Sisters Country Horizons Facebook page (www.facebook.com/sistershorizons) for updates on those.

Each community meeting will last approximately 90 minutes and engage participants in a series of questions similar to those used in the interviews and online survey. Due to the large number of venues, the meetings should be smaller in their attendance numbers, with

more opportunity for comment. Volunteer facilitators drawn from City of Sisters and Deschutes County staff and the community will help run the meetings.

"Community meetings and conversations with friends, family members, neighbors, and co-workers allow people to learn from each other and try to identify areas where they have shared values and hopes for the future of Sisters," said Sarah Giles, project manager at Oregon's Kitchen Table, that is helping plan the community meetings.

For those who are interested, there is also a "DIY" option for residents to host their own meetings with neighbors and friends. Called "Kitchen Table Conversations," residents can download a meeting packet with instructions and then turn the results of their conversations in to Sisters City Hall. (See the Sisters Country Horizons website for more information.)

"This is a wonderful opportunity for residents of the city and unincorporated areas of the County to come together and craft a joint vision for our community," said Patrick Davenport, community development director. "We welcome and encourage everyone to contribute to the process to make this effort a success."

For more information visit www.sistershorizons.org or email info@sistershorizon.org.

TOWN HALL: Senator criticized Citizens United

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United decision as a fundamental aspect of the current dysfunctional political discourse. That 2010 decision held that political spending is a form of protected speech under the First Amendment, and the government may not keep corporations or unions from spending money to support or denounce individual candidates in elections.

The Senator said that the Constitution is about having a government that reflects the will of the people, and that can't happen unless the power is distributed across the voters in an even manner — called the people's principle.

"Citizens United is the opposite of that. The Citizens United court decision says the wealthiest Americans can spend hundreds of millions of dollars on any campaign," said Merkley. "It is going to take real grassroots engagement to retake the 'we the people' vision of our nation. Hopefully that will help address a lot of other issues."

Merkley believes that the effort to make Medicaid a block grant program must be stopped. Instead of the complicated systems now in place, "We need a simple, seamless system of health-care available simply because

you live here in the United States." An audience member echoed, "Medicare for all."

The Senator explained he voted against the Omnibus spending bill recently passed, on principal, because Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) designees are still in limbo with their legal status unresolved and "that is fundamentally unfair." Merkley continued, "Dreamers are Americans and we need to get their legal status in place."

“ It is going to take real grassroots engagement to retake the ‘we the people’ vision of our nation. — Senator Jeff Merkley ”

The Omnibus bill does contain a number of programs for rural America, Merkley said, including increased rural broadband access, expansion of agricultural programs, rural development housing, and rural development water.

Trump's tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum were poorly targeted, according

to Merkley. He believes the U.S. has a larger foreign-trade problem. He said China is not a very large supplier of those metals to the U.S. but lots of other countries are. He outlined how once Chinese companies see American technology when working with U.S. companies, they then "do a divorce and run with our technology, so they have stolen our intellectual property and that isn't fair."

The issue of U.S. infrastructure is a big one, according to Merkley, requiring \$100 billion a year for 10 years. Instead, as a result of adjustments in the budget, the current \$240 billion will essentially be reduced by \$40 billion. Merkley is hopeful the infrastructure can become a bipartisan issue.

In March, Merkley was in New Hampshire meeting with the Democratic Party executive committee, giving rise to questions about whether he intends to run for the 2020 Democratic presidential nomination. Merkley said he is keeping his options open.

Last Wednesday's town hall was Merkley's 18th this year and his 342nd overall. Since being elected to the Senate, he has held open town halls in all 36 Oregon counties every year.

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