

CANYON VIEWS

Oregon families explore school choice



ERIN WOOTEN

Every January, educators, parents and others across the country join together to shine a positive spotlight on the variety of education options available for children during National School Choice Week. Jan. 22-28 marks the sixth annual National School Choice Week which started in 2011 to raise awareness of the many types of education alternatives available for students.

In Oregon, parents are fortunate to have several schooling choices available for their child — bricks-and-mortar public and private schools, public charter schools, homeschooling, online public charter schools, and blended schools which combine online and face-to-face instruction.

Support for school choice nationwide has remained strong. According to a new survey out this month by the American Federation for Children, 68 percent of adults polled indicated support for the concept, and that number climbed to 80 percent among millennials.

When it comes to virtual public schools, an independent survey of U.S. households, conducted last year by Connections Education, found a majority

(76 percent) of Americans and 92 percent of millennial parents felt that K-12 public school students should be able to choose tuition-free online learning options to meet a student's learning needs.

Across the country, millions of students in kindergarten through 12th grade take online classes, and there are an estimated 275,000 attending full-time virtual public charter schools, according to the most recent *Keeping Pace with K-12 Digital Learning* report. There are 127 charter schools, including 13 full time virtual public charter schools, available to students in Oregon. I am honored to be a teacher at the state's largest virtual public charter school, Oregon Connections Academy (ORCA).

At ORCA, I see students come to us for many different reasons. Some are here for medical reasons and require a flexible school schedule to make room for their often intensive, ongoing treatment; student athletes or actors who want to take their school "on the road" to a location for an extended time; high achieving students who need the extra rigor of advanced classes. Every family who chooses Oregon Connections Academy has their own unique story. But whatever the reason, my students and families can feel confident they are getting their individual academic, social and emotional needs met at ORCA.

My students attend classes with their peers using the internet, taught by Oregon certified teachers in all of their subjects. They can belong to many different online clubs including the Sci Fi, Book and Chess club. Students can also sign up for a variety of elective courses such as Spanish or Digital Arts. Our recent addition of the ORCA Student Government has allowed "civic minded" students to participate and experience the democratic process in the comfort of their own home. And for those students who love to get out and meet their peers, we have many field trips and other activities throughout the state during the school year.

One of the main reasons I enjoy teaching at Oregon Connections Academy is that this is truly a "school of choice." Students don't attend our school based on their address. Families choose to enroll their students in this virtual public school because, for one reason or another, the traditional classroom setting was not the best fit for their child. Online school may not be the best match for all students, but it can be a good choice for many children.

Our families tell us they are happy with the choice they've made to be a part of ORCA. In the most recent Oregon Connections Academy parent satisfaction survey, 95 percent say their children are satisfied with the ORCA pro-

gram, 92 percent agree the school is flexible, 91 percent recommend ORCA to other families and 90 percent of parents gave the school an "A" or a "B" grade. Families interested in learning more about Oregon Connections Academy's tuition-free school can go to OregonConnectionsAcademy.com.

This time of year marks the start of a new semester for many school districts, and quite a few students do switch schools during this time. Families thinking about making a change for their students should conduct advanced planning; get the proper transcripts and school paperwork in order and take other steps to ensure a smooth transition for both academic and emotional success.

Oregon parents can do their homework on the different education alternatives around the state, and they can explore the many different programs offered that might better meet their student's individual learning needs. National School Choice Week only happens once a year, but we can all celebrate school choice year round.

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Trump, Interior pick differ on climate

MATTHEW DALY
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON - Donald Trump's choice to head the Interior Department on Tuesday rejected the president-elect's claim that climate change is a hoax, saying it is indisputable that environmental changes are affecting the world's temperature and human activity is a major reason.

"I don't believe it's a hoax," Rep. Ryan Zinke told the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee at his confirmation hearing.

"The climate is changing; man is an influence," the Montana Republican said. "I think where there's debate is what that influence is and what can we do about it."

Trump has suggested in recent weeks he's keeping an open mind on the issue and may reconsider a campaign pledge to back away from a 2015 Paris agreement that calls for global reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

In contradicting Trump, Zinke cited Glacier National Park in his home state as a prime example of the effects of climate change, noting that glaciers there have receded in his lifetime and even from one visit to the next.

Still, he told Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., that there is debate about how much humans have influenced the climate.

Likely to win Senate confirmation, Zinke, 55, sketched out a variety of purposes for the nation's vast federal lands,



Interior Secretary-designate Rep. Ryan Zinke, right, R-Mont., says climate change is real.

from hiking, hunting, fishing and camping to harvesting timber and mining for coal and other energy sources.

The Interior Department and other U.S. agencies control almost a third of land in the West and even more of the underground "mineral estate" that holds vast amounts of coal, oil and natural gas.

An admirer of President Theodore Roosevelt, Zinke said management of federal lands should be done under a "multiple-use" model set forth by Gifford Pinchot, a longtime Roosevelt associate and the first chief of the U.S. Forest Service.

Zinke also pledged to tackle an estimated \$12 billion backlog in mainte-

nance and repair at national parks, saying parks and other public lands should be a key part of Trump's infrastructure improvement plan. But the former Navy SEAL said his most important task at Interior will be to "restore trust" between the agency and the states and Indian tribes it serves.

"One of the reasons why people want to sell or transfer public land is there's no trust, because they feel like they don't have a voice," Zinke said, referring to elected officials and residents of many Western states.

"They feel like they don't matter. Well, they should matter."

Zinke has said he would never sell, give away or transfer public lands — a crucial stance in his home state of Montana and the rest of the West where access to hunting and fishing is considered sacrosanct. Zinke feels so strongly that he resigned as a delegate to the Republican National Convention last summer because of the GOP's position in favor of land transfers to state or private groups.

Even so, Zinke's position on public lands came under fire this month after he voted in favor of a measure from House Republicans that would allow federal land transfers to be considered cost-free and budget-neutral, making it easier for drilling and development.

The Interior nominee "says he's against transfer of federal lands, but there's a big gap between what he says and what he does in that regard," said Michael Brune, executive director of the Si-

erra Club, the nation's oldest and largest environmental group.

Zinke told senators Tuesday that he flatly opposes all sales or transfer of federal lands. Indeed, his support for public lands was a crucial reason why Zinke was chosen by Trump. The president-elect and son Donald Trump Jr. both oppose sale of federal lands. The younger Trump, an avid hunter, has taken a keen interest in Interior Department issues and played a key role in Zinke's selection.

Zinke also reiterated his support for coal production on federal lands as part of an all-of-the-above energy strategy.

Sen. Maria Cantwell of Washington state, the top Democrat on the energy panel, asked Zinke about modernizing the federal coal program, saying it was important "to make sure American taxpayers aren't short-changed for the benefit of corporate interests."

Zinke promised to review the coal program and said he thinks taxpayers "should always get fair value," whether it's coal, wind power or other energy sources.

Zinke also pledged to work with members of Congress on proposed national monuments such as the Bears Ears monument recently designated in Utah. The state's Republican delegation fiercely opposes the monument created by President Barack Obama.

"I think a monument, when it falls in a state, I think the state should have a say on it," Zinke said.

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