

# Wyden, Merkley propose bill to upgrade power line system

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After proposing a bill that would feed \$1 billion into Oregon's power system improvements, the state's two U.S. senators reintroduced legislation Wednesday that would increase the allotment to \$10 billion.

Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley's "Disaster Safe Power Grid Act" would offer incentives to utility companies to do more to protect against power outages and wildfires through power system upgrades, fire and disaster safety equipment installation and proper vegetation management.

The proposal comes after historic wildfires across Oregon in 2020, including fires that ignited in Santiam Canyon following the Labor Day weekend windstorm, and the ice storms that knocked out power for thousands of Willamette Valley residents last month.

"In the last year alone, families in Oregon and around the country have felt the severe impacts of the climate emergency in their communities — some losing power for days because of the recent winter storms, and others losing their homes because of wildfires sparked by aging power lines," Wyden said. "The climate fight must include a significant investment in making our power grid more resilient to extreme weather events and that means partnering with utility companies to get the job done. This is a public safety issue, and as another dry summer is imminent, there's no time to wait."

If passed, the Act would:

- Establish a \$10 billion-per-year matching grant program for power companies through the Department of Energy to reduce the risk of disaster-caused outages or power lines causing wildfires.



U.S. Senator Ron Wyden talks with Dale Weise in front of his burned down home on Sept. 26, 2020 in Gates, Oregon.

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- Give special priority to smaller, rural electric companies.
- Promote proven methods for hardening the power grid and reducing wildfire risks, including undergrounding of powerlines, installation of microgrids, and strengthening utility poles.
- Provide for hardening of overhead power lines and clearing of brush and other hazardous vegetation where undergrounding of power lines is not a favorable option.
- Require power companies to have "skin in the game" by making the program a 1-to-1 matching grant, with an exception for smaller utilities where the matching requirement is one-third of

the grant.

- Deliver accountability on the part of utilities and the Department of Energy by generating a report every two years on efforts conducted under the grant program.

Marion County Commissioner Kevin Cameron voiced his support for the proposed bill.

"After experiencing a traumatic evacuation during the Beachie Creek wildfire, and losing electricity for days from this recent ice storm, it is evident Oregon is vulnerable to many different natural disasters," Cameron said in a release. "And because of my experience, I understand the need to strengthen the

utility Infrastructure against all disasters.

"The improvements resulting from Senators Wyden and Merkley's bill will reduce disasters in the future, but improve everyday reliability for our citizens who live, work and protect the environment in potential wildfire areas and all of Oregon," he said.

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## Festival

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on it."

He said the board may change the name of the event to the Silverton Arts Festival, dropping the "fine arts" designation, though that decision is still a few weeks out.

"With Covid, our painters aren't painting and nobody's coming in," Wood said. "The art market has basically collapsed. A name change is under consideration because we need a more disparate way of defining art."

Most Silverton Arts Association members are in their 70s and 80s, Wood said. Historically, most of the artists were painters, probably watercolors, some oil, some acrylic, he said. But both he and Case would like to see the definitions altered.

"I have a friend who says that if work isn't christened as art by the high priests of the New York establishment, then it's not art," Wood said. "I think we need to change the definition."

Case agreed.

"We all have a real appreciation for traditional art," Case said. "But we now are hoping we can somewhat bridge the gap between 'fine art' and 'commercial

art.' We need a broader range of options for people getting into the arts."

Wood said the organization's usual annual budget of about \$80,000 includes about \$25,000 from the festival. The organization also was awarded two grants last year, one from the federal government and one from Marion County. They are awaiting a possible award from this year's federal stimulus package.

"We're surviving; we're not in the red and we won't go into the red," he said. "We'll shut things down first. And if we can't do the festival this year, we will probably go under."

He said if the organization is able to

bring in the \$25,000 typically made by each year's festival event, "we could survive, even if we had just most of it. It may be a shadow of its former self this year, though."

"Ultimately I think (the pandemic) is going to be our salvation," he said, "because it's pushing us to make decisions now that needed to be made a long time ago."

The Silverton Art Festival is tentatively slated for Aug. 21 and 22.

Freelance writer/photographer Geoff Parks is based in Salem. Have Silverton story ideas? E-mail [geoffparks@gmail.com](mailto:geoffparks@gmail.com).

## Graham

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website, Lindsey details her business' struggles.

"In one day, every business my husband and I owned was told to CLOSE... We had no income coming in, 6 leases to pay, 6 overhead bills, our own personal bills and no clue when we would be able to earn a living again."

She said they closed all their businesses on March 23, 2020 and "were unemployed and going into debt further every day."

The Grahams declined to answer questions about how many, if any, of their businesses closed permanently.

Lindsey Graham's Facebook profile said she started at Glamour Salon in 2009, the same year she joined the social media platform. Her social media presence was largely muted, private and focused on promoting her business until May 5 — when she posted a video announcing the "grand re-opening" of her salon.

Posts soon turned political and critical of mask-wearing and shutdown policies.

"Just got yelled at by a customer in a store for not wearing a mask," she wrote in one post in February. "He tried to have me removed twice... We can win this people!!!"

With national media attention and the status as a hero among many protesting mask mandates, the results of the election and business closures, Lindsey's personal Facebook spawned a Patriot Barbie Facebook page, a Patriot Barbie Instagram and a Patriot Barbie Parler account.

Until recently, her Facebook pages gave little indication that she has left Oregon. Her Parler lists her Dream Built page, her Mewe profile says she is in real estate and her Instagram account describes her as an "AZ refugee."

Despite the claim of moving to a "deep red" state, Arizona voters elected President Joe Biden by a narrow margin in the 2020 election. The once solidly Republican state now has two Democrat senators and is considered a more "pur-

ple" or "magenta" state.

In November, voters in Maricopa County — home to Phoenix and its metropolitan area, which includes Buckeye — favored Biden over Trump in a 50-48 split.

### A fresh start in the desert

In July, the same month Lindsey took the Oregon government to court, the Grahams registered their new business Dream Built Investments LLC with the Arizona Corporation Commission.

Both are registered as members and managers with their Silverton addresses listed.

But they do not appear to own the house where the business is registered, property records show. The house is in Buckeye, near an age-restricted, "active adult" master-planned community called Sun City Festival.

Maricopa County Assessor records show the Grahams purchased a different house in Buckeye in September for \$395,000. The assessor's site lists the home's cash value as \$324,000.

The only property listed as being owned by Dream Built Investments is a residential parcel in Sun City purchased in February.

Many of the geotags on the Dream Built Instagram page in early March appeared to be false.

A photo matching Zillow photos of the Grahams' former Silverton home is tagged "Phoenix, Arizona" and posts on the business's Instagram site include several tags for Verrado — a master-planned community in Buckeye. None of the properties connected to the Grahams through real estate records are located in Verrado.

The business website in early March displayed several galleries of staging, custom builds and interior design.

Many of the pictures — a chandelied bedroom, brick patio, a freestanding bathtub overlooking a green field — appeared to have been pulled from the real estate listing for the Silverton home and appeared on the Zillow listing.

Others, like one showing a wheeled, wood pallet coffee table, appear to be stock photos and are on websites dating back years.

### Non-profits, legal funds and lots of merch

Lindsey has turned her struggle public. And it has led to donations. Thousands of them.

In the statement announcing her departure from Oregon posted on her social media page, Lindsey said the persecution from Brown gave her a voice and a platform.

This platform includes multiple social media accounts, a webstore and a non-profit organization.

Her website features a prominent "Donate Now" button, links to a GoFundMe fundraiser and an online store featuring American flag motifs and shapely silhouettes in front of American flags.

Two GoFundMe accounts state that they were created for Graham to help pay any fines or attorney fees for re-opening early.

By March 2, one of the accounts with Graham listed as the organizer had raised \$79,676.

On her website, she mentions a second GoFundMe account "opened by a supporter" that raised enough money to cover her OSHA fine and legal fees. A link to this account is not active.

Lindsey created a non-profit foundation called the Glamour! Institute for Freedom, whose stated purpose is to "promote and support legal challenges and cases ... that advance the free market, support property rights and advance the cause of freedom in the public's interest."

When asked, Graham and her attorney did not say whether they were handling cases other than Graham's.

The Institute for Freedom and Glamour Institute for Freedom Legal Center, Incorporated, are both registered as non-profits under Lindsey's name, according to Oregon Secretary of State records. Graham's attorney, Day, is listed as the registered agent for both organizations.

Graham and Day declined to specify how much money the non-profits had raised and how the funds were spent.

Graham has also created a social media presence on Facebook, Parler and Instagram directing fans to her online

merchandise at [patriotbarbie.com](https://patriotbarbie.com). Merchandise includes Trump pens, pin-up style calendars and American flag flowy cardigans, leggings, earrings and purses.

It also includes a link to Graham wearing a Santa hat and singing "Donald Baby" to the tune of "Santa Baby."

The webstore specifies that proceeds are donated to the Glamour! Institute for Freedom.

It states all proceeds from her 2021 Patriot Barbies calendar go to the Wounded Warrior Project and the K9s for Warriors charities. With 100 calendars being sold for \$30 each, this would amount to \$3,000, but Graham declined to specify how much had been donated to the charities.

Graham ends her biographic section on her site affirming her choice to bring her family and business into the spotlight, despite the attention and harassment allegedly forcing her to leave her home state.

"I do not regret a moment of my choice," Lindsey said on her website. "Going through this has given me the strength to be who I need to be. A strong voice for conservative women, a voice for small business owners, a voice for Americans."

She said the turmoil spurred her to become "Patriot Barbie" — an insult once lobbed at her by a "liberal" in Salem that she then took on as her own moniker.

Graham said she intends to use her new-found platform to forge ahead and those intending her destruction actually created new opportunities for her family.

She vowed: "You can certainly expect to see big things coming from me soon."

For questions, comments and news tips, email reporter Whitney Woodworth at [wmwoodworth@statesmanjournal.com](mailto:wmwoodworth@statesmanjournal.com), call 503-910-6616 or follow on Twitter [@wmwoodworth](https://twitter.com/wmwoodworth).

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